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The White Avenger. ²⁶²



THE
WHITE AVENGER;

OR,

THE DOOMED RED-SKINS.

BY MAJOR LEWIS W. CARSON.

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THE WHITE AVENGER;

OR,

THE DOOMED RED - SKINS.

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLAGE IN THE VALLEY.

IN a deep, narrow valley between two mountains, hemmed in on every side by rough, almost inaccessible heights, a roving party of Blackfeet had made their dwelling-place. Along the banks of the little stream which supplied them with water and fish, their lodges had been erected, and here, at least, two hundred of the wild tribe had found a home.

In the midst of this wilderness, hundreds of miles from any who could render him assistance in case of need, surrounded by those whose greatest earthly delight would have been to torture him, sat a white man, to all appearance quite unconcerned. He was perched near the summit of one of the acclivities rising from the front of the village, partially screened from observation by a scattering cluster of bushes, through which he could easily watch all that transpired below him.

This personage, a young man, was tall and powerful in build—the very ideal of a daring and valiant scout. He might have been thirty-two or thirty-three years of age, and the contour of his features showed that he had been designed by nature for other and nobler pursuits than that of following the Indian's trail. But the very fact of his presence there was proof sufficient that he had, for the time at least, abandoned all else for the destruction of the red men. In his hand he held a very heavy double-barreled rifle, and in his belt stuck a pair of pistols and a knife.

The afternoon was well advanced, the sun having long since cast the shadow of the hills over the village. Very soon

the silence and darkness of evening would creep along the valleys, and find their way up the mountain sides. The Blackfeet who had been absent were now coming in, and an unusual bustle ensued among the dirty wretches who inhabited the village. But the keen-eyed scout moved not from his position.

"Go on with yer rejoicin'," he growled. "When this light comes back ag'in ye won't feel that good ye do now. I fancy it would disturb yer peace a little now, if ye knew the White Slayer sat here a-watchin' ye. But, ye don't know it, though ye'll find out soon enough."

Suddenly the voices of children came to his ears, borne upward through the darkness. His manner changed at once, and his head sunk upon his breast.

"Poor children," he said, in tones very different from those he generally used, "who knows how many of you will meet the fate *my* children met? I hope none. It is the grown-up fiends I war with. But for them, I might have been a happy man to-day, sitting in a pleasant home, with the sweet music of my children sounding in my ears. But now the dear voices are all hushed—still in the grave—and these red-skinned fiends it was who made me the wretched, purposeless being I am! Ah, it has cost them dear already, but they shall pay more yet ere my loved ones are avenged!"

Speaking thus, with a great deal of intensity in his tones, the scout slowly gathered himself up, and was about to rise to his feet, when a movement near by caused him to sink back very quickly, his hand almost instinctively seeking his knife-hilt.

"What a fool I am to mutter so," he thought. "I must keep my tongue stiller, or I shall have it pulled out by the roots just to gratify some of these brutes."

It was evident that whatever had made the movement which startled him was approaching, and looking up from his partial cover, the scout saw that an Indian was stealing toward him.

The White Slayer had but one purpose. He glanced quickly around, and assured himself that his adversary was not backed up by a host. Then, placing his gun carefully upon the ground, he produced his knife, and waited till the

Blackfoot was within two yards of his hiding-place. Then he sprung forth with a bound, grappled the astonished native, and before any resistance could be made, had driven his knife through the red-man's heart.

The latter sunk to the earth without any cry save a low groan, and the victor coolly proceeded to wipe his knife. But, even as he did so, a second Indian arose from some invisible corner, gave vent to a loud yell of alarm, and sped down the mountain side as fast as he could pick his footing.

An exclamation of impatience escaped the white, and he hastily raised his rifle. One moment only he held it, and then its sharp report rung out, echoing from mountain to mountain, while the Indian pitched headlong down the rocky cliffs, landing far below.

"His venison's settled for him," the scout remarked, proceeding very rapidly to reload the barrel of his rifle just discharged. "Now what'll I dew? I don't feel like taking a long run unless I'm obliged tew—I guess I'll work around the other way."

The Indians could now be seen pouring out from the village by scores, and taking their way up the sharp ascent as rapidly as possible. The White Slayer, waiting till satisfied that all were tending in the direction from which the rifle-shot had sounded, moved away from the spot, bending his steps along the mountain side, and finally descending toward the valley.

In a few minutes he stood upon the opposite hillside, having passed half-way around the valley, thus placing the village between himself and those searching for him.

It was now so dark that he could see none of their forms, though sounds of the search still came to his ears. He crept down within twelve rods of the lodges, and threw himself upon the ground, muttering as he did so:

"A real pity 't isn't an hour later."

The scout showed himself quite equal to the task of waiting, however, maintaining his dangerous position with an unconcern and carelessness which almost seemed to invite destruction.

But, none of the Indians suspected or discovered his position, and when the full darkness of night had shut in the scene, he rose very carefully and moved down into the midst

of the lodges. There were many Indians stirring, but none saw or heard the movements of the dark figure that so silently glided about the place.

Hither and thither, back and forth, the scout passed, as though inviting destruction. Suddenly one particular lodge seemed to attract his attention. He crept toward it, and soon succeeded in making a hole through which he could observe the interior. Apparently satisfied, he passed around to the entrance, and darted in, though a dozen savages were within plain view at the time.

The sounds of a fierce struggle and fall ensued, and in a moment thereafter the white man burst out through the back of the lodge, and made his way quickly up along the side of the nearest hill. Here, crouching behind a friendly bush, he waited for the development.

Presently a curl of smoke rolled up from the wigwam, and in a short time a light blaze followed. This quickened and brightened till the whole lodge was a sheet of flame.

Of course an instant alarm was raised among the savages, for the lodges stood very compactly in the valley, and every one was endangered by the flames. To pull down those nearest upon either side was the attempted work of the Indians, but, before they succeeded the heat became too fierce, the lodges upon which they were at work took fire, and they were driven away.

Every vessel in their possession that would hold water was now brought into use, and efforts made to check the progress of the flame. But, the means were totally inadequate to the end, and as the scout retired slowly from the scene he beheld the bright tongues of flame leaping up, and tearing away, promising to speedily destroy every thing combustible in the valley.

He rubbed his hands in ferocious glee, while a ghastly smile of satisfaction overspread his features.

"Burn!" he cried, waving his hand toward the scene, "burn, as *my* home burned, when ye made me the reckless man I now am!"

A sudden yell broke from the savages, announcing his discovery. In the excitement of the moment he had incautiously stepped into full view of the red-skins, and the strong light of

the flames had revealed him to them. By chance none of them were prepared to follow him at the moment, or discharge an arrow in his direction.

Springing upon a rock in full view of the astonished savages and raising his dreadful rifle, the strange man exclaimed, in tones which rung out like the notes of a trumpet :

“Red-skins, the White Slayer is in your midst for vengeance !”

Quickly following the words came the sharp reports of his rifle, both barrels fired in rapid succession. A great commotion announced the fatal effect the bullets had taken. Then, as a score of savages rushed out in mad pursuit, he sprung from the rock, and glided away, speedily finding cover, and frustrating in the darkness all attempts to follow him. The Blackfeet, baffled and confounded by such undreamed-of boldness, returned to their late town to find it a mass of ruins, while the dreaded white man, peering over a rock upon the very summit of the hills, beheld with satisfaction unspeakable the grim work of desolation which his hands had wrought.

“It is for my wife and babes !” he muttered, turning again into the forest-depths. “Their blood is still red upon the earth, and while my life lasts this work must go on—this work of vengeance !”

CHAPTER II.

THE SLAYER STRIKES.

WHEN satisfied that the whole Indian village was consumed the White Slayer turned away through the forest, taking a general south-eastern course.

It was a trifling matter for the strong-limbed scout, who was as much at home in the forest by night as by day, to travel eight or nine miles, breaking his trail several times, so that any in pursuit must of necessity follow very slowly.

When this distance had been accomplished he paused, selected a comfortable spot, and threw himself upon the ground. A light blanket which he carried about his shoulders

was spread over him, and in a few moments he was sleeping soundly, perfectly unconcerned in regard to the great danger which encompassed him on all sides.

When he awoke the gray tinges of coming day were penetrating the forest. He rose, stretched his limbs lazily, laughed as he remembered the scene of the previous evening, and then glanced around very carefully to satisfy himself that none of the hated race were within reach of his death-dealing rifle.

Rolling up his blanket, and diving his hand into his wallet, he brought out the last piece of meat it contained.

"Ha! my feed has nearly run out," he remarked. "I must look around for more. It won't be safe to let off a rifle in this vicinity a few hours hence; possibly I can send a bullet through somethin' about this time."

He looked for game, but none appeared within sight. Advancing along on the route he proposed to take during the day, he still kept a constant look-out for any game that might present itself.

Possibly he might have gone a mile, still not seeing any thing worth shooting at, when he was quite confounded by hearing a sharp rifle-report, evidently less than half a mile distant.

"Hokey!" he muttered, "what can that mean? Blackfeet don't carry guns, not as a gin'ral thing, and not *that kind*, if they hev any. I must see what the meanin' of all that might be."

He stole forward in the direction whence the report had sounded, observing the utmost care as he advanced. Presently through an opening in the woods, he saw something move, and very soon thereafter had settled one point in his own mind.

"Gracious me!" he exclaimed, half-aloud, "there is a white man, sure as I live, and he has shot a deer. From his movements I reckon he's hungry. I wonder if he's white man or Injin at heart."

A short examination of the surroundings satisfied the scout that the stranger was quite alone, and it was apparent that he was a fugitive, from the manner in which he cast frequent apprehensive glances about.

"If I was an Injin, how easy I could come it over him,"

the White Slayer mused to himself. "I'm half a mind to give him a grand scare, and then, if he proves a runnygade, I can easy enuff send a blue pill through his carkiss."

He had actually begun to creep forward with this purpose in view, when his keen eye detected a movement at some distance, and, on watching carefully, he caught glimpses of two Indians who were working their way up toward the white man. The latter was now so busy in removing the skin, and slicing up some of the choicer parts of the deer he had slain, that he paid little attention to what was going on about him.

As the savages glided rapidly up on one side, the scout also approached, keeping his deadly rifle ready for immediate use.

But the Indians were much nearer the endangered white than was the scout, and when they produced arrows and prepared to shoot, he was still at long rifle-range.

However, he could not hesitate. The dark twin tubes were poised for a moment, and then a sharp report rung through the forest-arches. The Indian for whom the messenger was sent obeyed the summons at once, falling to the earth in a confused heap. His companion, quite astounded by this reception, unbent his bow and sprung away through the woods, frustrating the attempts of the Slayer to obtain a shot at him.

"See here, that never'll do," the scout exclaimed, lowering his rifle, and darting through the forest. "No red must run away from me in that shape—he and I've suthin' to settle."

The strange white man, aroused to a sense of his position by the deadly work going on around him, had sprung to cover and hastily commenced reloading his rifle. As he dashed by within two yards, the White Slayer exclaimed:

"Hang around here a few minutes. I'll settle this red-skin's business for him, and then be back ag'in."

"I'll wait," the other responded.

The scout dashed away through the woods in pursuit of the fleeing red-man. He had two reasons for this earnest pursuit. He did not wish to leave any Indian alive whom he could possibly slay, nor did he wish the savage to bear to his fellows any information concerning the presence of two white men in that immediate vicinity.

But the most desperate and skillful must fail at times, and

the Slayer was no exception to the rule. When the pursuit had tended something like a mile from the starting-point, he beheld a thin, vapory cloud rising through and above the trees at some distance, directly in the course they were pursuing.

He halted in a moment, and leveled his heavy rifle, both barrels of which he had succeeded in reloading upon the run. The flying savage was a long rifle-shot ahead, making desperate efforts, for he knew that safety lay but a little distance in advance.

The long rifle sounded its sharp note. The Indian stumbled, staggered, recovered himself and plunged on, giving utterance to a loud cry of alarm. It was answered by a perfect chorus of yells, so near at hand that the pursuer turned upon his heel and fled back toward the spot where he had left the white man.

"I wouldn't mind a little tussle with 'em myself," he growled; "in fact, I'd rather enjoy it. But the truth of the business is, this 'ere feller out here don't know *any thing*, and I've got tew look out fur him, as well as number one."

In a short time the scout had gained the vicinity of the spot where the savage had fallen before his rifle, and he looked anxiously around for any trace of the lone white man whom he had saved from an exceedingly great peril.

To his surprise, that personage did not appear.

"Sure this must be the place," he remarked, glancing about. "Yes, it *is* the place, fur thar lies the carkiss of the deer now. Let me see what this all means."

He stepped behind a tree, and proceeded to scan the forest far as his eye could reach, but, to his surprise, could discover no traces of the man he sought.

"Reckon thar's suthin' passin' strange in that," he growled, clutching his rifle-stock with impatience. "I told the feller to wait, and he said he would. Now, thar's nothin' tew be seen of him, hide or hair, and I can't stop to look him up, fur how many of the bloody reds are comin' clus behind I've no idea of. No, confound it all, he'll hev ter look out fur hisself. I don't want tew stay here any longer."

Even as the scout raised his rifle to leave the spot, a prolonged howl of rage and joy, bursting from many savage throats, gave notice that the Slayer was discovered.

"They can't bring me down on a dead race," he remarked, taking one tremendous stride ahead.

It was his last in that direction. Even as he made it, a dozen or more savages broke from cover full in his front, and bore down toward the place, brandishing their weapons in fiendish exultation.

A glance to the right showed him that he could entertain no reasonable hopes of breaking through in that direction, as he would almost inevitably be riddled with arrows, if he succeeded in eluding a more dreadful fate.

To the left, then, was his only chance, and even there he would be obliged to meet and defeat three of the red-skins, who were coming down from that direction. But his heart shrunk from no such task.

With bounds which a frightened deer might have envied, he sprung through the forest, which was quite open at that point. The Indians, being far beyond arrow-flight, and, very fortunately for the scout, having no fire-arms, redoubled their howls, and rushed down upon the flying white, whose chances of escape seemed meager indeed.

It was a moment of the most intense excitement. The three Indians toward whom the scout was rushing, fairly danced with joy, brandishing their hatchets, and waiting for the happy moment when they could strike from the earth him who had dared to intrude thus into their pleasant hunting-grounds.

Straight toward them went the scout, never varying from the direct course, till he came to a sudden halt within twenty yards of the howling, dancing trio. One moment the dark, deadly rifle rested in mid-air, and then its loud voice spoke a red-skin's death-note. At the same moment the three savages hurled their hatchets.

The act was simply suicidal on their part. The Slayer saw the movements, and dropped to the earth, allowing every one of the weapons to pass harmlessly over.

It is needless to say that the Indian at whom he had fired fell. The remaining two, mistaking entirely the cause of the scout's prostration, rushed upon him without any weapons in hand, while from those who were hurrying up on either side arose a wild shout of triumph.

But it was speedily made apparent that the end was not

yet. The White Slayer sprung to his feet, dashed his rifle against the head of one antagonist, placing him *hors du combat*, while, with a furious kick, he sent the other rolling over the ground in a writhing, groaning ball of agony.

Momentarily the scout had triumphed, but this was only the beginning of a series of desperate adventures. The instant he overcame his three enemies, and started to continue his flight, he was made the target for an arrow from every Black-foot within bow-range.

Fortunately for the hunter, these were not many, and his rapid movements baffled their aim, so that, although the deadly shafts fell all about him, not one of them even touched his clothing.

In a few moments the shooting of arrows ceased, and then the Indians bent themselves to the race. It was a fearful sight to see that one lone white man bounding away through the endless forest, with a bloodthirsty gang, full a hundred in number, at his back. The odds against him were terrible, certainly the more so when it is considered that he had just indulged in a race of some two miles, while his foes were comparatively fresh.

A few, and only a few, gained upon him. It was with apparent satisfaction that he glanced back and noticed the fact.

"Run, dragons, run!" he hissed. "Ye may overtake me, but a sorry day 'twill be for ye if sech happens tew be the case!"

Suddenly a deep, wild ravine appeared, in the bottom of which rolled a mountain creek, somewhat swollen from the effects of recent rain. For a moment it really seemed as though all hope of escape must be cut off, and that his only choice lay between a deadly fight with a hundred aborigines, and the cold embrace of the rushing torrent. But, even while he cast about a glance almost of despair, he saw something which seemed to promise still an avenue of escape.

Turning quickly, and shaking his fist toward his pursuers, the daring scout scrambled down the bank of the ravine. There were vines, bushes and brambles growing along the margin of the stream and up the side of the ravine, so that the refugee found himself quite concealed from view. But he did not pause a moment. Some distance above he had seen

what appeared to be a tree fallen across the stream, and toward this he made his way.

The Indians, on gaining the bank of the ravine, naturally enough supposed that he was hiding among the bushes, of which they at once made targets, sending arrows in abundance among the thick clusters.

Meanwhile the hunted man made his way up-stream, keeping as much as possible in the shelter of the bushes and vines. He was gratified to find that a fallen tree spanned the current at the place he sought, and promised a ready means of crossing. No bushes sheltered it, however, and when he sprung forth to cross it, he was fully exposed to the gaze of the Indians.

He was discovered at the moment, and plenty of arrows turned that way. But he moved quickly, and before many shafts could be sent he was secure upon the opposite bank. He had noticed that the log upon which he had crossed was considerably decayed—that it swayed and threatened to give way beneath his weight, and a happy idea followed these observations. Retreating beyond the reach of arrows, he stopped and fell to reloading his rifle.

“I’d like to broke that thing off, and I would, if the redskins hadn’t been quite so close,” he growled. “But it looks weakly, and if they try crossin’ there I imagine they’ll save me the work.”

The Blackfeet did not delay long, but rushed for the fallen tree in a body. A dozen at once mounted it, and began to hurry across. Just as the foremost was above the maddest part of the stream, the decayed trunk broke with a loud snap, and three of the savages tumbled into the dashing flood.

A mocking laugh came from the triumphant scout, and as the baffled Indians turned to retrace their steps, a single shot from his rifle tumbled two more of their number into the creek. The second barrel spoke a moment later, and another victim followed. Again that mocking laugh rung out loud and clear, as the dreaded foe proceeded to reload his weapon.

The whole body of Indians hastened to put themselves beyond reach of the bullets they had learned by bloody experience to fear, looking up and down the banks of the ravine for some means of crossing.

The scout kept as near them as possible, sending over an occasional shot till all had retreated far beyond his reach, when, fearing they might find some means of crossing, and again surround him, he left the place, making his way rapidly through the forest.

"Confound that stranger!" he muttered, in no gentle tones. "I do think he was nothing but a runnygade, arter all. A fine race he led me! But if I meet him ag'in, and *I mean tew*, 'twill cost him more than he has made! However, I've had the chance of sendin' several red-skins under, and come out all right myself, so I don't mean to grumble much!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTIVE.

Two days have passed since the scenes related in the last chapter.

As evening draws near we find the White Slayer lurking near an Indian village something less than fifty miles from the scene of his late exploits. The situation was very different from the one in which we first found him. This village, like the other, was in a valley, but the sight was less confined. The hill rose gradually upon two sides, while to the east the valley opened and descended, and finally spread away in a heavily-timbered glade of exceeding loveliness.

A small river danced and wandered happily through the town and watered the glade below. The lodges were picturesquely arranged; and, from a distance, romance might imagine that the charming forest-retreats of which fancy had dreamed were found at last. But, romantic and picturesque as was the place from a distance, upon nearer approach one would discover those marks of filth and squalid wretchedness which everywhere mark the habitations of the red-man.

At the moment when we introduce him, the Slayer was at least half a mile from the village, upon an eminence whence he could look down upon the Blackfoot settlement. Whether

the Indians had obtained evidence of his presence or not he could in no way determine ; but, certain it was they manifested an extraordinary degree of vigilance, and the daring scout had frequently found himself in great danger of immediate discovery.

At present he had crept into a recess formed beneath an overhanging rock, difficult of access, from which he could look down upon the village, yet perfectly secure from observation, unapproachable save from one particular point, which a little effort on his part would guard so effectually that none could reach him to do him injury.

No sun shone upon the scene, for heavy clouds, which seemed to promise a storm, had long before shut in the heavens. But light was now gradually fading away, and the scout began to move somewhat uneasily in his narrow quarters.

"How I wish dark would hurry up," he muttered ; "or that the storm would come along, if there's going to be any. I want some chance to get out of this. I don't fancy these stowing-away places. Some are always getting into caves, and such like. None of that for me. I don't fancy being underground till I'm through breathing. The air there don't agree with my lungs. But here, what is up? Somebody is helping me talk. I'll do some tall listening."

The sound of Indian voices could now be distinctly heard, above, below, and around the rock in whose cleft face the scout had found his hiding-place. It was evident that quite a large party of Indians was in the vicinity, also that they had paused, and were holding some kind of consultation in regard to the village below them.

"I don't see jest what all this means," the scout mused. "These red-skins don't belong down below, that's a fact; and they're up to suthin' or another—that's putty sartin, tew. I don't like it much. I'm in rayther a ticklish position, if I know myself ; though fortunately it is getting near night—near a storm, too."

Some time passed, at least fifteen minutes, during which the White Slayer watched and waited for the savages to leave the place. But they had no intention of gratifying him. He could hear their movements all about, going and coming with

the greatest unconcern, talking freely, though their language was all a sealed book to him.

Finally they seemed to have in some degree relapsed into quiet, and he began to hope that they were making preparations to go from the spot. He was upon the point of peering out to see if such was really the case, when a faint smell of smoke came to his nostrils. He listened closely and could hear the crackling of flames at the foot of the rock, some twelve feet beneath him. Presently the smoke began to roll up in thicker clouds, drifting into the cleft, much to the scout's inconvenience.

"Blame this smoke; it strangles me," he growled. "I don't want to fall a-coughing now; it would be very likely to raise mischief with me."

But the wind freshened presently, and bore away the smoke somewhat, so that the scout experienced but little further trouble. The darkness increased rapidly, too, and presently he ventured to peer over the brink of the rock, and inspect his uninvited company.

About twenty Indians were present, as nearly as he could judge. Of this number less than one-half were warriors, the remainder being mostly squaws, with a few children. But the object which most riveted his attention, making him for the moment forgetful of all else, was not an Indian.

Mingling with the party, however, and apparently quite at home there, was a girl, who, though clothed in Blackfoot costume, was unmistakably of white blood. Her features were beautiful and regular, her hair of a wavy brown, quite light, almost golden, in hue. In form she was rather below the medium, plump and full, with an ease and grace of movement perfectly bewitching. The scout gazed at her for some moments, quite forgetting himself, and the danger incurred by his rashness. He watched her for a time as she moved about among those rude men, and then drew back beneath the shadow of the rock, as he mused upon what he had seen.

"One thing is sartin"—such was his mental decision—"that gal ain't an Injin, but she's tryin' to make one of herself, or else sutlin'—I guess I don't understand it all."

For some time the White Slayer watched the movements of those below, getting more and more mystified as he en-

deavored to settle in his mind the condition of the beautiful girl. At length, as darkness gathered over the scene, he noticed that she left the vicinity of the fire, and seated herself upon a fallen tree at some distance from the remainder of the party. Here she bowed her head upon her hands, and remained motionless, as though in deep thought.

"Suthin' about her bein' here that ain't right. I believe I kin find out, and strike me with lightning if I ain't going to try it on."

He assured himself that his weapons were ready for use in case of need, and then crept from his position, necessarily passing within three yards of the savages at the fire, and gaining the forest unperceived.

Of course it required time for him to come up behind the white girl, owing to the extreme caution with which he was obliged to proceed, but, when he came near enough to observe her, dimly defined against the fire, he was gratified to find that her position was the very same she had assumed ere he set out upon his mission.

Creeping up, foot by foot, upon his hands and knees till within reach of her, the scout put forth his hand, and placed it upon her arm, at the same time uttering a low signal of caution.

The girl started, very naturally, and would have sprung to her feet had not the scout repeated his words of caution. Assured that no harm was meant her, she remained sitting, gazing upon the dark form of the scout, evidently quite as much astonished at his presence as he had been at hers some-time before.

"Don't be alarmed, my gal," he said. "I only want to know who you are, how ye come here, and if I kin help ye any."

"Who are you?" she asked in a low whisper.

"Injins call me the White Slayer," he returned. "I am a scout, and Injin-fighter. All I live fer now is to kill red-skins."

"I never heard of you," she said, shaking her head slowly.

"Very likely not," was the careless reply. "This is my first visit here, and the Blackfeet don't know me as some other tribes dew. But they wlll git acquainted by the time

I leave, I'll warrant. Now who are you? I can't stay here wasting time; there is a storm clus at hand."

"I am a poor, friendless girl, sir; at least I have no friends save these Indians. When I was eight or nine years old my father's family were all killed, and I was brought away here. They are very kind to me. I do about as I please, and I try to be contented."

"Don't you want to get away, back among white folks?"

"Oh, sir, I have no friends there; I am rude and ignorant, as I know, and I might not be as happy there as here. Besides, it is so very far away, I should never escape there, were I to try."

"Look here, girl," said the white man, impressively, "I had a wife once, and she was as beautiful and good as any being God ever made. But these red scoundrels came and killed her. I have followed them for seven or eight years already, and wherever I have gone, a line of blood marks the ground. I meant to fight them as long as I lived; but now I have changed my mind a bit. If you'll go home with me—and we kin git thar, for I kin sarcumvent all the Injins this side of Tophet—I—I—"

He paused for a few moments, and then added, in a more composed tone of voice:

"I have a home there. You shall be my dearest friend on earth—*my wife*—and I am sure all who know you will love you, and be your friends. Will you go?"

One moment the maiden looked upon him, while she seemed gasping for breath, and then she answered, spasmodically:

"Oh, sir, do not ask me that! You do not know *what* you ask me! I can not go; it is better that I remain here."

Then, after a momentary pause, she added:

"I thank you, sir—thank you very much, but I can not go. I must stay here. You must go, too, or these Indians will discover you, and then it will be too late. They are coming for me. Farewell."

An Indian had left the party at the fireside, and approached the spot where the girl sat. As she arose, he addressed some words to her in the Indian tongue, to which she replied in the same dialect, and followed him to the fire. The scout watched them for a moment, then put back the knife he had produced

ready for use in case the savage came within his reach. Unconsciously heaving a deep sigh, he turned away from the spot.

As he did so, heavy drops of rain came rushing through the forest, and one struck his face. Pausing as he was about leaving the place, he looked back to the ledge.

"I need not be in a hurry," he said, mentally. "I never shall see her any more, and that ain't a bad place to stay through a storm. I'll try it."

He did try, and in a short time was safely ensconced beneath the projecting rock. The storm was now beginning to howl through the forest, and the rain fell in heavy drops, increasing in volume every moment. It was a most uncomfortable time to be abroad, and the savages shrunk up against the rock, trying to escape some of the fury of the blast. The scout looked forth with a shudder, and then drew back to the innermost portion of the retreat, where he was effectually sheltered from the dashing rain. Here he fell to musing.

"Confound me, what a fool I made of myself," he growled. "Falling in love with that gal when I more than think it likely that she's married a'ready to some of these red niggers. She didn't tell me *why* she was so very independent and preferred an Injin tew me. No, nor she didn't tell me her name, either. But, no matter. I made a heavy spec there, and only that I guess she won't blow on me, I should have got myself inter a nice fix. I pity her, though, down there in that rain with nothin' tew spread over her, and then I pity her for gittin' hung to them red-skins for life the way she's done. No mistake about it, the gal's as smart as a trap, and as a hankerin' for better company. Strange that I should say to her what I did! I didn't suppose I cared for any thing but vengeance, and yet, I can't deny I was in earnest in all I did to her."

At this moment the scout's thoughts were diverted to another quarter. The surging of the storm through the trees was so heavy as to drown all minor sounds, but during a momentary lull, the white man fancied he heard some movement near him. He raised his head, that he might listen the more intently.

Not long was he in doubt. The sounds were repeated, and

almost at the same moment a hand was placed upon one of his legs !

The intruder uttered a grunt of surprise, and the Slayer knew that he shared his narrow retreat with one of his mortal enemies !

CHAPTER IV.

“OH, NIGHT, AND STORM, AND DARKNESS.”

WHEN the Slayer felt the hand upon him he moved a trifle, and uttered a grunt as nearly like that of his companion as possible. His object was two-fold. First he wished to get in a position for work, and also to mislead the intruding savage with regard to his character. Both were successful. The savage paused, and addressed some sentences to him in the Blackfoot vernacular, of which the scout had not even the remotest knowledge. Obtaining no answer, the Indian repeated the question, with considerable additional emphasis.

This time he was answered, but it was by the foot of the white man, which was planted about eighteen inches below his chin with such force as to send him over the brow of the ledge, without a particle of breath left in his body.

Of course his sudden advent among his brethren below was a matter of great surprise, and they at once gathered about him to learn the cause of his unceremonious descent.

Very likely they were enlightened somewhat a moment later, when the White Slayer followed, dropping into the midst of the wondering crowd, crushing two or three to the earth, but sustaining no injury himself. His pistols were quickly discharged into the thickest of the crowd, and then, with a wild yell, he broke through the astonished group, before any one thought of seizing him, and disappeared in the forest.

Some of the Blackfeet followed when they had recovered their senses sufficiently, but we need not state in detail that they soon returned, being unable to find any traces of their disturber, picked up their dead and wounded, and crept down to the village below them for protection.

But their foeman was there before them. When he paused in the forest after getting fairly clear of the savages, he hesitated but a moment, and then bent his footsteps at once toward the village. His going there was rather a matter of instinct than otherwise, for he had no settled purpose at the moment. Getting in the vicinity of the village, he stopped a few minutes to reconnoiter, and finally stole in among the lodges, peering into such as he could reach without exposing himself too openly. He had not visited more than two or three when the Indian from above reached the vicinity, and immediately there was a general pouring forth to greet them.

From one lodge in particular, near which the scout was concealed, at least a dozen of the tawny-skinned race rushed out.

"Creation," mused the white man, "there can't be many left there. Let me just steal up and look in."

He did so.

No savages were inside, and the remains of a fire burned in the center of the lodge. Without any delay the white man stole around to the entrance, crept into the lodge, and scattered the fire where it could not fail to communicate with all that was combustible.

"Thar, red niggers," he joyfully exclaimed, "when ye look at that ye kin think of the White Slayer!"

The combustibles inside at once sprung up into a light blaze, so that the scout had scarcely stepped outside, when he was conscious that his escape would be rendered difficult from the very ruddy glow which lighted up the darkness.

He was espied before he could gain any cover, and with a yell of wild alarm, a score of savages started toward him at once. Their outcry gave the signal to twice as many more, and, in less time than it takes to read it, the scout found himself completely hemmed in by the yelling, enraged crowd. Hatchets and knives gleamed abundantly in the glowing fire-light, and the whooping Blackfeet, whose tender mercies were proverbially cruel, even for Indians, gloated over the scenes of horror which they would prepare for the daring white man on the morrow.

But the scout was quite as much interested in the state of affairs as any one, and he had no intention of furnishing the

savages with any sport on his own account. He looked around until he saw what appeared to be an opening through which he could escape, and in that direction he rushed.

Here, however, he found himself confronted by half a dozen Indians, and, narrowly escaping two or three weapons which were hurled at him, turned and sought a more favorable avenue.

Finding himself entirely surrounded by the whooping fiends, he saw very plainly that his only course now open was to fight his way out as best he could. The light of the fire was getting uncomfortably brilliant, and he wished to take the shortest way toward the dark retreats of the forest.

Unluckily, this led him almost directly through the thickest of the savages, but he did not pause to regard the Indians he might encounter. The discharge of his double-barreled gun carried a momentary consternation into the ranks of the savages, and, before they had recovered, the Slayer was in their midst, swinging his heavy gun about with lightning rapidity, and pressing right onward through the yielding crowd.

The situation was one of intense excitement. Could any have looked upon the scene with a friendly interest in the fate of the brave white man, they would have held their breaths with horror while he remained thus, hemmed in on every side by the howling, furious Blackfeet.

A score to one was fearful odds in a hand-to-hand combat, but the ranger seemed scarcely to heed them. Striding straight through their ranks, and keeping his heavy gun swinging before and around him, occasionally striking one or two of their number to the earth, he so scattered and completely astounded them that he was presently able to break away from the crowd and dash for the woods.

A dozen followed him, and that so close that none could launch an arrow, until he darted into the dark shade, where traces of him were completely lost, and no weapon could be made available.

Having momentarily eluded the close pursuit, the White Slayer stopped as he crossed a gentle streamlet, and picked up two or three stones—mere pebbles. He could hear the Blackfeet calling to one another within a few yards of him, and

knew that they were at a loss in which way to look for him. Possibly they could be misled.

He gave one of the pebbles a pitch through the forest. When it fell a number of the Indians heard the sound, and, not having time to analyze it, naturally supposed it made by the scout in some of his movements. A rush in that direction ensued, and, while it was being made, the white hastened to put a more agreeable distance between himself and the late scene of conflict.

When it seemed to the hardy ranger that he was beyond danger of immediate discovery, he paused, and set about investigating the result.

"Come out very well, considerin' the risk I run," he mused, at length. "Rifle wet—pistils in like condition, most probably. Three small cuts, to let off the surplus juice of life—that's all, and that's very well. The reds'll feel sorer'n that when they count up!"

Whether or not the search was still continued, he could not determine. If so, it was done stealthily, and the heavy rushing of the storm completely drowned all the sounds the savages made. A thousand footsteps could not be heard amid the constant patter of the big rain-drops, and, as the wind tore away branches and swayed the great trees with many a doleful creak, the scout shook his head and muttered thus to himself:

"No, I don't think they'll try it such a night as this. They'll lie clus, much as they like ramblin' around in any common kind of a storm. They'll keep watch, of course, that I don't git back and dew 'em more mischief, but that'll be all. I'll endeavor to stop this bleedin,' and then I'll make the best of my way to some place whar I kin stay and sleep awhile, out of the storm; but blame me if I really know whar I'm to find such a place."

The three wounds which he had received were all light, fortunately for him, so far away from any assistance. He was used to dealing with such visitations, and in a short time had skillfully bound them up. This done, he took up his gun and turned it over with an expression almost mournful.

"Cl'arly, thar ain't any use of loadin' this up now," he muttered, "fur the old boy hisself couldn't discharge it till it's

dried and cleaned. I'll take ye with me, old death-doom, and we'll lay up for repairs together."

Throwing it over his shoulder, he moved on through the forest, guiding his steps only by the direction of the tempest. The storm still continued in great fury. The rain fell in drenching volume, and the wind howled and swept incessantly. It was a fearful night.

The scout had gone but a short distance, when the gale appeared to borrow a new fury. The whole forest seemed to bow and writhe in agony. Heavy trees fell in every direction, and branches without number were hurled to the ground. Just in advance of the scout a monster tree came down with a crash. He paused and listened to the tumult going on all about him.

"E'ena'most as dangerous here as it was among the redskins," he mentally exclaimed. "Wish I was in some safe corner—I don't fancy this much."

A cracking, sweeping noise above startled him. He moved quickly to one side, but, as he did so, stumbled and fell. The next moment there was a blinding crash, a dreadful sense of darkness came over him, in which all his consciousness faded away, and existence became a blank.

CHAPTER V.

IN DURANCE.

How much time was lost to the White Slayer that night, he never knew. Probably an hour or two. His first sensations after the interval of darkness were of a great, crushing weight upon him, and a pain which pervaded his whole being from head to foot.

Involuntarily he groaned aloud, and struggled to free himself. But a great power seemed holding him to the earth. Again he struggled, this time putting forth all his energies. The exertion seemed to make his brain whirl and crack, the sound of rushing waters came over him, and all was blank once more.

But his groaning and struggling was not without effect. An Indian, creeping through the forest, heard the groan and glided to the place. He could see nothing, for night's most impenetrable darkness sat upon the bosom of earth. His instincts guided him nearly to the place, however, and he heard the last movements of the white man ere he once more relapsed into unconsciousness.

Divining something near the truth, the savage listened cautiously for a long time, scarcely moving or breathing, but as may be suspected, his care brought no returns. The scout lay within two yards of the Indian, utterly unconscious. He had been struck upon the head by a falling branch, receiving a blow which would have killed most men, and now the heavy limb lay across his body, holding him to the earth and causing the intense pain he had experienced.

The storm had now abated to a considerable degree, the wind having nearly ceased, though the rain still fell outside, and pattered down in big drops from the trees above. It was so nearly calm that the lone savage could listen quite well.

Just as his impatience was about getting the better of him, the Blackfoot heard a faint movement close at hand. Bending almost to the earth, and creeping up like some blood-thirsty tiger about to spring upon his victim, he surveyed every thing till his eyes rested upon the broken branch. Then he comprehended all.

The scout made another movement, and bending close over him the savage took in the whole situation. For a moment he poised his spear, and moved his arm to deal the deadly thrust. Then his fiendish fancies triumphed. Moving back a few yards he gave utterance to a wild cry, which was answered from almost every hand.

The Slayer heard it, as though in a dream, and struggled to regain his feet.

"That's an Injin yell," he said, as he vainly struggled. "Let me think where I am, and what it means. Strange I can remember nothing. Ah, yes, I have it now. I am in the forest, and—and I was—let me see, what was it happened to me?"

He strove to bring his mind into full play, but could not,

and while every thing seemed to become chaotic about him, those familiar yells again sounded through the forest.

The vail of darkness was rent at last. He remembered how he had been fleeing through the forest, when the noise of a falling branch had alarmed him, he had fallen, and then all became blank.

Even as this realization came to him, the white man heard the movements and guttural conversation of many savages about him, and knew that he had been discovered. The thought of falling into their hands was more agonizing even than the pain of his wounds and bruises. He struggled to free himself, but that he could not do.

Then he felt for his pistols, but remembered that he had not reloaded them after his affray upon the hillside, so that they were of no use to him now.

He had no time for further deliberation, as the Blackfeet pounced upon him, secured his arms and legs, placed a thong of deer-skin about his neck, and then lifted off the wood which held him to the earth.

After a few moments he was able to stand, and then the lashings were removed from his ankles.

With shouts and congratulations, taunts and blows, the savages conducted him back toward their village.

The entire population seemed swarming, notwithstanding the storm. Long before the party having the prisoner in charge reached the village, a half-hundred women, children and warriors had joined them. Their expressions of satisfaction were most unmistakable, and nothing but the indomitable courage and will of the scout enabled him to bear up under the numerous wounds and bruises he had received, with the addition of blows and torture of every kind from the accompanying savages.

Arrived in the village, the chief, who was a middle-aged Indian of tall and fine proportions, inspected his bonds, and ordered him cast into the council-lodge, with a guard set over him. When the order had been executed the Indians dispersed to their various lodges, and a dull quiet pervaded the place.

The prisoner had now abundant opportunity to commune with himself, and canvass his situation. He was quite lame and sore, having been severely bruised by the falling bough.

His head, too, was swollen, and pained him very much. He saw very little prospect of escape. He was securely bound, a fire burned in the center of the lodge with sufficient brilliancy to reveal any movements he might make, and two armed savages kept vigilant watch.

Still his iron heart did not despair. He merely canvassed the situation in his own mind, and knowing that nothing could be done at present, composed himself, and was soon sleeping, though not very heavily.

He had been in dream-land some time, in his night-visions still dealing death among the savages, when he was awakened by a loud commotion among the savages without. At first the clamor seemed to mix with and form part of his dissolving dreams, but presently he became satisfied that some external cause was at work.

Evidently the Blackfeet were hugely triumphant over something. The sounds drew nearer, and appeared to come directly toward the place of his confinement. Evidently he would soon obtain light upon the matter.

Presently the entrance was filled with human beings, a white man was pushed into the pale circle of the firelight, and with much surprise the White Slayer gazed upon the very man whose life he had saved two or three mornings previous.

The man, apparently utterly overcome and dispirited by the evil fortune which had befallen him, and the abuse to which he had been subjected, did not observe the prisoner already in durance, but staggered across the inclosure, sinking upon the ground with a dejected groan.

The Slayer gazed upon the new captive with varied emotions. In the first place he was much surprised to behold him there, supposing him to be a tool in the hands of the red-men. This he was still inclined to believe, and he explained the man's present trouble on the ground that he had done something to irritate the savages.

At any rate his want of spirit and fortitude induced the contempt of the hardy scout, and when another guard had been added to the force inside the lodge, and all was quiet again, the stern ranger addressed his companion:

"What's the matter that ye're takin' on so?"

The new-comer looked up quickly.

"What, you here too?" he asked. "I am not alone in my trouble then, it seems."

"No, ye ain't alone. But what's the matter that ye take on so?"

"I have brought this all on by my foolishness," the stranger replied. "I hung around here when I ought to have gone away, and so got into trouble."

"Ye ain't very friendly with the Blackfeet, then, I take it."

"Oh no, not now, for they seem determined to kill me. I've been kept a captive here two or three years, but not long ago I happened to save the chief's life, and he was so pleased that he told me to go back to my people. I staid awhile, for there was something I wanted to do before I went, and now I find myself the object of their suspicion and hatred."

"Very fortunate is it for you that we meet as we do, and you tell me this, for I fully meant to shoot you, when I set eyes on you ag'in!"

"You! Pray, why?"

"You recollect that two days ago I saved your life in the forest near fifty miles from here?"

"Yes, indeed; I shall not soon forget it."

"You promised to wait at that particular spot for me. Instead of you I found a gang of Blackfeet."

"And for that you intended to kill me? Indeed, I was not to blame. I was taken prisoner almost before you had disappeared, and removed from the spot. What transpired after that I only surmised. But I know there was great excitement, and finally I was almost forgotten, so that I managed to make my escape. But then I couldn't go away, peaceable, and so got into this bad scrape. Tell you what, comrade, I don't think there's but one way for us to get out of this."

"What way is that?"

"Fire!"

"That ain't a pleasant way of going. But then we needn't give up till we're obleeged tew. I've knowed cases as bad as ours to come out all right. But cheer up, man, and tell us who ye are, and what's kept ye a-hangin' around this place when ye *could* git away."

"I'll tell ye, because I shall feel better to have somebody to

talk to. I s'pose you'll call me a fool, but I guess I more 'n half deserve that."

By the firelight the White Slayer could see that his companion was not far from twenty-five years of age, of medium hight, quite strong in build, and with an open, intelligent countenance which indicated a good degree of natural ability. It is quite possible that a suspicion of the truth flashed over his mind before the young man began his story.

CHAPTER VI.

A WOMAN'S SACRIFICE.

"My name," the prisoner began, "is Tom Smith—quite a common one, by the way. Of course you don't want to know much about my early days, for those have nothing to do with this time. A few years ago I was trapping along the west shore of Lake Michigan. We fancied ourselves pretty secure, as we had a retired spot, where game abounded, and where we supposed neither white men or savages ever came. But we found our mistake, and that at no distant day. Early one morning a large body of savages broke upon us as we were examining our traps, and took us all prisoners—there were six in our party at the time. One was killed outright, and all the others followed him within half an hour. I only was kept, and finally the savages took me home with them, a prisoner. For two years I staid with the party who claimed me, thinking I was lucky in keeping my life. All this while I was planning and watching for an opportunity to get away. Finally fortune favored me in the way I told you, and I had the privilege of going home. But I was not ready.

"I knew another captive whom I wished to take with me. A girl who has been with the Blackfeet these many long years. She has grown up with them from childhood, and now is almost a young woman. Although a white girl, the savages are very fond of her, and I think the chief means to make her his wife."

"What is her name?" the White Slayer interrupted the speaker to ask.

"The Indians call her Sunlight; but I think her white name is Mary Dawson."

"And she came to this village to-night, did she not?"

"She did."

"Then I've seen her. But go on. Don't let me interrupt you ag'in."

"To tell you the truth, for I may as well be candid," the speaker continued, dropping his head with a feeling which the scout understood perfectly well at that moment, "I did not care to leave the miserable life I had been leading unless she would go with me. I confess I had fallen completely in love with the girl. Then I wished her to go back to some civilized part of the world, and enjoy the life she was so decidedly fitted for by nature. Even after I saw her once, and was repulsed, I remained hereabouts until I suppose the chief found what my intentions were, and now it seems I am to pay for my hardihood with my life."

The scout did not observe the melancholy tone in which the last words were spoken. His mind was full of the gentle, beautiful being he had seen by the Indian camp-fire, and of the declaration he had made to her.

"She refused you, did she?" he asked, scarcely conscious of what he was saying.

"Yes, yes; she told me to go to my people, and she would stay where she was," Smith replied, still keeping his head bowed, and speaking in a measured, distant manner.

"See here, stranger," said the scout, suddenly, speaking with new energy, "I want to ask one question. It ain't any of my business, but I'll be jest as frank with you; so ye kin tell me and not do yourself any harm."

"You can ask me a dozen if you wish," the young man returned. "I have no secrets now."

"Then I want to know what reason the gal give ye for wantin' tew stay among the red-skins."

"Only that she had friends among the Blackfeet, and that if she went back among her own people she was afraid she might not find anybody to care for her."

"Just what she told me!" the Avenger remarked.

"What do you mean?"

"Just this," returned the scout. "I saw this very Mary Dawson this evening, fell in love with her at a glance, went down and declared myself, and she told me what I said—just the same that she told you. But I'm over with my foolishness now."

"I can't say that," remarked Smith. "I love her just as much as I ever did. But I don't really understand her, after all."

"Very sartin thar's suthin' about the gal we don't know of. Don't you think she may be in love with this chief?"

"No; I do not think she loves him. She has told me as much. But I more than suspect she may throw herself away upon him, after all. You do not tell me how you came here."

"My real name is Job Dennis; but among the Injins I'm knowed only as the White Slayer. Some fancy led them to give me that name, and it hangs to me like fate. However, it suits me jest as well, and I'd rayther they'd call me by it."

He then proceeded to narrate the sad events which had blighted his life years before, and sent him upon the track of the red-men. How he had pursued them for years with the same bloody purposes, striking them where he was least expected, carrying death and dismay everywhere, and generally escaping nearly or quite uninjured himself, to repeat the same bloody scene in another locality.

He had many an incident and reminiscence to relate, and as it pleased his companion to listen, he did not cease till the gray light of morning began to penetrate the lodge.

"We may as well prepare for the other world," said Smith, as the savages began to bestir themselves.

"Yes; that's true," Dennis replied. "We ought always to be ready. But I don't fancy the confounded Blackfeet are going to send me to the other world to-day."

"Your faith is much stronger than mine," returned the younger. "I see no escape."

"Just so with me," was the cheery reply. "I don't see it, but I can't help hoping there may be one; and I ~~thinks there~~ *is*!"

"God grant it may be as you imagine."

The sound of footsteps and a movement at the entrance attracted their attention.

Two figures entered the lodge.

Both the men started.

The intruders advanced and gazed upon the prisoners.

Mary Dawson, or Sunlight, as she was known among the Indians, came in advance, closely followed by the chief, Rolling Thunder. A smile of proud satisfaction mantled the lips of the latter, while the expression of the former was difficult to determine.

For some moments neither of the four spoke. Then the maiden, who was nearest to Smith, said :

"Foolish men, why did you not do as I bade you, and leave this place while you could?"

Smith did not reply, but the White Slayer, looking straight at Sunlight, said, in tones of intense meaning :

"Young woman, my home was happy once, with one more beautiful even than you. But these red-skins have made it desolate, and, no matter when I die, I shall fight them till that time comes. This young man would like his liberty, no doubt, but he would almost as soon die as go from here alone. Do you not understand that?"

"I think I understand," the girl returned, with an exceedingly pained voice. "But if he goes it must be alone. I can not go from here, even if I would."

"Yes, you can, gal," the scout exclaimed, in an excited tone. "Jest you say the word, and see how soon we'll take you away from here."

"Rash man! Do you not know that both of you are doomed to die, and can not save yourselves, not to mention me?"

"Thar's nothin' sartin in this 'erc world but death; and *thar* ain't sartin till it comes. Hope is a great thing in such times as these."

Here the chief broke in with some sentences in his native tongue, the import of which the scout did not catch. Sunlight listened till he had finished, and then turned again to the white men.

"If you were free once more would you depart quietly and not molest these Blackfeet any more?"

"Far as I'm consarned," said the Avenger, "I shan't stay here a minute longer than I'm obliged to. If ye prefer these murdering cut-throats to a white man, I've no opinion in the premises."

"Indians are not the only murderers," the maiden retorted. The scout scowled, but shut his teeth closely.

"And you," she continued, pointing to Smith, "if you were free again to do as you pleased, would you go?"

For some moments the man sat in silence, and then he looked up.

"Sunlight," he said, "are you asking these questions to torture us?"

"No," she replied, shaking her head; "they mean something; so think before you answer."

"Then," he said, with an effort, "I'm of the opinion of my friend here. I needn't repeat it, for he said it all in plain words."

Something closely akin to a look of pain seemed to cross the maiden's features, but she turned to Rolling Thunder, and the two conversed together for some time. Finally they moved away, and five minutes passed before they again appeared. But in a short time they came back, the chief bearing Smith's gun and knife. With the blade he cut the bonds which confined the young man, and when the latter had risen to his feet, the Indian presented him with the rifle and knife. A few sentences in the dialect of the Blackfeet followed, and then the young man turned to his late companion in captivity.

"I have permission to go once more, but I mustn't be seen here after noon, or the Indians 'll kill me," he said, with a much more hopeful visage than he had heretofore presented.

"Wal, that's good as fur as it goes," White Slayer returned, very calmly. "But look out they don't kill ye before noon, for they're a treacherous set, as ye must have l'arnt."

"I'll not give them much chance," the young man returned. "I shall leave these parts rather quick. I hope you'll be allowed to go with me, my friend."

"Don't entertain any sech hopes. I've done 'em tew much mischief to be let off this easy. Never mind me."

Another consultation occurred between Sunlight and Roll

ing Thunder, which lasted for some time, and when it was ended the maiden turned to the captive.

"Rolling Thunder will release you," she said, "if you will promise never to fight the Blackfeet any more, as long as you live."

"Oh, I'll promise that, if they won't pitch into me first."

The chief bent over and severed his bonds, after which the maiden added:

"You will be safe till noon. After that time the Blackfoot that finds you will have the privilege of killing you. Now, don't be foolish any more."

"I won't. But tell me this. How do you get us free?"

"That does not concern you. And yet, I may never see another white man. I will tell you. *I give myself to be this chief's wife!*"

The Avenger started as though shot.

"You shan't do that!" he exclaimed. "It's too much. Here, put on them whip-cords ag'in!"

"Go!" the maiden said, impressively. "*I save myself from a worse fate!*"

The scout looked at her in sorrow for a moment, then, following the direction of the outstretched finger, walked slowly from the lodge.

CHAPTER VII.

A SHIFTING OF SCENES.

As they passed out of the lodge the scout received his weapons, which had been taken from him at the time of his capture. He grasped them eagerly, and his flashing eyes told how he longed to throw himself upon the hated Indians, and make the earth drunken with their blood. Nor was he alone in this thirst for savage gratification. The angry and foreboding scowls of the Blackfeet themselves showed how great was their disappointment, and how they longed to throw themselves upon the white men and tear them limb from limb.

But, Rolling Thunder walked beside them, and the Indians

were not prepared to break out in open rebellion, even for two scalps.

When the chief had accompanied his two *protégés* as far as the confines of the town, he placed a hand upon each, and then pointed solemnly toward the east. No words were spoken, nor were any needed. Each understood the other and accepted the issue.

The White Slayer and Smith climbed the hill which rose to the eastward, and when they had nearly gained its summit paused to rest.

"Let's look the thing over," said the former, throwing himself upon the grass which sprung up in the open glade. "We may as well find out how we stand with the world and ourselves here as anywhere. Yer gun ain't in firin' condition, I take it."

Contrary to their expectations both guns were found to be in firing order, and were carefully loaded. But here another unpleasant state of affairs was developed. Smith had but three bullets, Dennis seven, and neither more than half a dozen charges of powder.

"What do ye say to that, eh, Smith?" the scout asked. "Ten balls, and not more than powder enough to send 'em flyin'. No more to be had within any reasonable distance, and a thousand Injins to every bullet between us and any white men. How do ye like the prospect?"

The young man shook his head, and when he had carefully primed his piece he said.

"That's a pretty scant supply if we have any fighting to do."

"Fightin'—yes, so it is. But we must eat sometimes, and unless we ken induce wild animals tew come within knif range, why we must use our powder on 'em. I'm jest about half starved now. But say, what do ye think of that gal's smartness?"

"Think! Why I'm more in love with her than ever. I tell you, I don't feel right to see her mated to that chief."

"Ye won't have to see it, that's one consolation."

"You jest about it. But I shall know it's done; so there will be no real difference, after all."

"Thar's suthin' about it all I don't understand. Now tell

the truth, boy; do you know *why* she persists in staying there when she has any chance, or any offer of help to git away?"

"No indeed; I know no more than she has told me, and that I repeated to you."

"Strange, strange, very strange," the scout muttered, as he rose to his feet. "But come, the sun is up, and we had better be making tracks."

"See here," remarked Smith, as the two men rose, "can you tell me what all this commotion means?"

He pointed down to the village they had just left, and the Avenger's eye followed his finger. He could see at a glance that the Indians were very much agitated. Parties of them were hurrying this way and the other, while the main body of the warriors were gathering, as though in anticipation of a conflict.

"Well, there is something I don't understand, that is sure," remarked Dennis. "It looks as though they anticipated a fight, but I don't see any foe."

But the mystery was soon solved. Even while they stood watching the rapid movements of the savages below, there sounded a loud and terrible war-whoop from close beneath the base of the hill upon which the two white men stood.

"That's a Dacotah whoop, unless I very much mistake," Dennis remarked. "Yes, here they come, and they are Dacotahs. Ah! That explains the fuss. See here, Smith, this little town is going to change owners in just ten minutes!"

It certainly looked as though such would be the case. The Dacotahs, if such the savages were who drew near in hostile array, were not more than fifty in number, but they carried fire-arms quite generally, and had the appearance of being tried and true warriors.

They came up on a run, and when within arrow-flight of the village, stopped and poured in a volley. Only one of the Blackfeet fell, and that was no less a personage than Rolling Thunder. Some of his braves seized him at once, and carried him back among the lodges, but it was evident that he was dead. Leaving his body in the most secluded corner, the savages returned to the fray, dreadfully enraged, but without a leader.

The Dacotahs loaded their guns and fired once more, and

then they charged in a wild, impetuous mass into the village. A furious hand-to-hand conflict ensued, but it was evident from the first that the attacking party had the advantage. In ten minutes the Blackfeet were flying in every direction, pursued by the victorious Dacotahs. Slaughtered warriors, squaws and children lay upon all sides.

"Poor Sunlight! What will become of her?" moaned Smith, as from a thick covert they gazed upon the bloody scene.

"That we can't tell," returned the scout. "But we can tell very well what will become of us if we go down there to find out."

"See, there she comes now!"

Even as Tom spoke the maiden came forth, looked for a moment upon the bloody scene around, and then started to fly, almost toward the concealed white men. As she did so several Dacotahs espied her and started in pursuit.

The White Slayer carefully leveled his rifle, saying, "Don't shoot, unless to save her life. If we bring the whole gang down on us we shall stand a poor show in our present state."

It cost Smith a severe struggle to see the poor girl taken back by the exultant savages, but they offered her no immediate bodily harm, and he could do no otherwise then submit.

"Can't we ever help her?" he asked, gloomily, turning to his companion.

"Wal, I think we kin, now," was the reply. "We've got a chance, I guess. Don't think she would refuse us now if we were to offer to take her home among civilized people."

The defeated savages were now flying in every direction, and the Dacotahs pursued. A few remained to guard the three or four prisoners that had been taken, while some of the wounded, taking a hint from the charred remains of the lodge which the White Slayer had fired, applied the torch to those still standing.

The scout stood regarding the scene in deep thought.

"If it was near night you and I could go down thar and clear the hull crowd out," he said. "But now it won't do; we've got to wait."

Then, after a moment, he continued:

"I've partly got an idee."

Smith grasped his rifle, for he hoped to strike a quick blow

in behalf of Mary. But the expression of his features changed a trifle when Dennis continued:

"You see that tall pine away yonder about a mile. In about an hour or two I'll be there if nothin' happens. If *I ain't*, make the best of your way toward home."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know, Tom. I've got an idee that we kin pick up some ammunition or sutbin' of that kind, but I don't know jest how. Ye make fur that tree yonder, and hang around fur three hours, at most. If I don't come in that time—"

"I understand you," Smith returned; "but it seems to me as though I should part with you forever."

"Look-a-here," said the scout, turning quickly upon his companion. "If ye feel as chicken-hearted as ye talk, I should almost wish ye—no, I won't say any thing bad, but I r'ally think we shall part for a good long time. Ye've got to hev more *zip* to ye—but I must go—it never'll do to stand here talkin' any longer."

He turned away and moved down the hill at a rapid pace. Smith gazed after him for some time, and then turned away in the other direction, muttering:

"What a reckless man he is! I wish I had his bravery and perfect contempt for danger. But I am differently constituted, though, I trust, not quite a coward."

Passing on over the hill on which he was standing, the young man had gone but a short distance when he came to quite a deep valley, through which flowed a purling brook. The very sight of the cooling waters sent a thrill of delight through the beholder, and, dropping upon the ground, he took a long, hearty draught of the refreshing beverage.

Much invigorated and comforted, he rose, wiped the water from his beard, and was about to proceed, when his eyes encountered a sad and bloody spectacle. Not more than fifty feet away lay two dead Indians, a Blackfoot and a Dacotah, their bodies across each other, one thrust through with a knife, the other with his head cleft by a hatchet, and each still grasping the weapon that had slain the other.

Hoping to replenish his powder-horn, Tom approached the prostrate ones, and, bending over them, began to search for ammunition. He found none, however, and, as he was upon

the point of leaving the place, he heard a rustling among the bushes just in front of him, and a moment later three Indians burst into sight, coming almost directly toward him.

They were Blackfeet, and recognized him at a glance, for they set up a howl of satisfaction, and began to brandish their weapons. If he *would*, Smith could not escape them by flight, and as there was only one other course open to him, he leveled his rifle, shouting to the savages to pass upon one side, or he should shoot the one nearest him. But the savages heeded neither the motion or the words which accompanied it.

No trees were there for shelter, so the Blackfeet began to dodge hither and thither, one of them throwing his hatchet at Smith with exceeding fury. While the young man was recovering himself after the quick movement it required to avoid the keen blade, the trio rushed upon him, hoping to gain a speedy advantage. But they were quite mistaken.

Quickly recovering his aim, Tom pulled the trigger, and was gratified that the piece did not miss fire. There was a loud report, and the trio of assailants was reduced to a pair.

"I will be as dauntless as the White Slayer," the young man said, with a sudden determination.

Clubbing his rifle while the white smoke still poured from its throat, he dashed upon the two red-skins, who at the same time rushed toward him with equal fury. The result was a collision about half-way, in which both parties were staggered, but neither utterly defeated. The sweep of Smith's rifle was parried by the Indians, and, before the white man could regain himself, the savages grappled, and threw him to the earth. But even in that unexpected result, he did not entirely forget himself. Dropping his gun, he grasped the nearest Indian and pulled him down also, keeping a death-grip fixed upon his throat.

The remaining Blackfoot danced about, flourishing his hatchet and exulting in the supposed victory of his comrade. Nor was he undeceived until the strangulation of the victim had induced a most unmistakable struggle. Even then it was difficult to strike an effective blow without danger of injuring his fellow-brave, so that some more time was lost in running back and forth.

In the midst of the excitement, a new party appeared upon the scene, the first intimation of whose presence was a volley of bullets cutting down the standing red-skin, and flying in unpleasant proximity to the prostrate foemen.

Glancing out, Smith was not sensibly relieved to behold five or six Dacotahs approaching, already liberally bespattered with blood, and evidently thirsting for more. While he would not now be required to surrender his life at the will of a Blackfoot, it was far from clear that he would be any the more considerately treated by the exultant Dacotahs, from whom he could by no means escape. He threw off his now insensible adversary, and struggled to his feet as they approached, making signs of peace and submission.

A few made rather hostile demonstrations, but the white man pointed to the two Indians, saying :

“ Am I a friend of the Blackfeet, that I should die ? ”

Most of the savages understood English, and they gathered around him, while he was questioned by the leader of the party as to his purposes, and the reasons of his being in that far-away country.

At first the young man was half inclined to tell his whole story, hoping in that manner to enlist the sympathy of his captors, but he reflected that to do this he must betray the White Slayer, and that was not to be thought of. So he informed the savages that he had been held a prisoner by the Blackfeet for a long time, but was finally released, and was about leaving for his home among the white men.

“ What you do for Blackfeet ? ” the leader of the party asked.

“ Oh, hunt, fish, build wigwams, trap for furs, and a great many other things, ” he replied.

The Dacotahs consulted for a few minutes, two of their party having taken away Tom's rifle and knife previously. In the midst of their deliberations a return call was sounded, which they at once hastened to obey, giving their captive his choice between a tomahawk in the brain or accompanying them.

We scarcely need say that he chose the latter.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A DAY'S MARCH NEARER HOME."

THE Dacotahs hastened by the most direct route to the site of the late Blackfoot village, and on reaching the place the whole party was found assembled. It appeared that fifteen of the invaders had been slain, and a council was held as to the disposition of the bodies. Only thirty able-bodied savages remained, five or six being wounded, so that transporting the bodies of their fallen back some hundred and fifty miles to their own country was not to be thought of. Neither had they time or means for burying them. It was finally thought best to throw them into a deep pool in the river, with a stone attached to each, so that they might not rise again prematurely. In this work Smith assisted heartily, and, though he was closely watched by the red-men, it was plain to be seen that he was gaining a hold on their confidence.

Mary Dawson was still held captive, with two of the most beautiful Blackfeet maidens, and Tom sought an opportunity to exchange words with her. But in this purpose he was persistently and entirely frustrated. The savages kept him at a distance, and jealously noticed and frowned upon any attempt of his to get nearer.

As he had opportunity the young man glanced furtively around, hoping and half-expecting to see or hear something of Job Dennis. But he dared not in any manner indicate to the savages his anxiety, and an hour passed during which he heard nothing from the daring scout.

When the dead Dacotahs had been disposed of, and every possible indignity offered to the fallen Blackfeet, the party began to assemble, prepared for a return to their own country. The wrong, real or fancied, which they had come to avenge had been wiped out in blood, and now they would be quite satisfied to escape from the country, ere the enraged savages should pour upon and destroy their little band.

But Smith was far from satisfied when he beheld unmis-

takable indications that the party was to be divided, himself going with eight or ten of the Dacotahs, and the maidens, white and red, with the balance. Such a movement was wholly unexpected to him. He wondered at it, since it would weaken the force very much in case they should be attacked, as would quite possibly be the case. But another, and very unpleasant, fact was that it would most effectually prevent all coöperation between himself and Mary. Should she be exposed to any dangers he could render no assistance, and should any opportunity for escape present he must go forth alone.

The Indians evidently had spared Tom's life with the intention of making him useful. He was heavily loaded with a quantity of wild meat, and other spoils, some of the fallen red-men's weapons, and whatever required transportation. In this manner he relieved the shoulders of the warriors, and was himself so hampered that there could be no danger of his breaking suddenly away from his captors.

The line of march once taken up was maintained till full noon. It seemed to the prisoner that he should drop in his tracks from exhaustion, but death was written upon the faces of all the attendant savages should he give way, and so, without a murmur, he toiled on, though the sweat poured down his face in streams, and his limbs trembled beneath him, despite all his assumed firmness.

About midday the party stopped beside a sparkling water-course, and a quantity of dried meat was served out to each. This proceeding lightened Tom's load somewhat, and gave him opportunity to rest, and refresh himself from the food and the pure, delicious water.

Only a few minutes' rest was allowed, as the Dacotahs were unmistakably anxious to put a good distance between themselves and the scene of their late exploit.

Smith resumed his load at their bidding, and it felt much lighter now than when he laid it down; though he almost shuddered to think how long before darkness would come, during all of which time he must toil wearily on, while the night could bring no decided hope.

On, steadily, with a monotonous tread, they moved till the sun was low, and Tom's spirits quite as much so. Then they halted, again beside a brook, took a bite of meat, swallowed

It hastily, drank from the stream, and again resumed their course.

Smith was disappointed. He had fancied the day's march ended, but now it was resumed, and none could tell how long it would continue. He was weary, lame, and every joint in his body ached from the unusual, long-continued exertion.

Right onward they went, through the deep and unbroken forests, till night-shades drew over them, and the whole wood was wrapped in the somber mantle. Every moment the captive expected them to slacken their speed, and select a bivouac. But no such intention was manifested.

At length the darkness became so intense that Tom could scarcely see his file-leader, and then the party halted. But it was only for a moment. A thong was put about the captive's neck, and the end placed in one of the Indians' hands, after which they proceeded as before.

How long they traveled thus, up-hill and down, through mire, over rocks, and among brambles and bushes, Smith had no means of knowing. The time seemed almost interminable.

He had barely strength to stand, and move forward as the rope was kept taut, but he had no real perceptions of time or distance—only of his own pained existence.

After a long time he was aware that those in advance had halted, and too weak and weary to care any longer, he threw himself upon the ground, scarcely fearing the blow he more than expected.

But a death-stroke was not given him. Instead, his hands were tied behind him, and the thong made fast to a sapling. No fire was lighted, and the severe storm of the previous night had evidently not reached there, as the earth was quite dry. One Indian was placed upon guard, and then the party stowed themselves away as best pleased each individual.

Smith was so utterly overpowered by fatigue that he fell asleep very soon, and slept for some time, though how long he could not determine. The stars were shining when he awoke, and it was not so intensely dark as when they had halted.

From these circumstances, in connection with his own feelings, he argued that it must be considerably past midnight, perhaps near morning. In any case, as he had heard nothing

from the White Slayer, it was time to see if any thing could be done in his own behalf.

He listened carefully. All seemed sleeping soundly, even the sentinel at his post, so far as could be judged, having forgotten his duties.

Surely the moment was favorable.

The prisoner drew gently upon his fastenings. They were secure. He began very carefully to turn so that he could manage in some manner to loosen them. To his surprise and mortification, he found that this was an impossibility. Perchance if he could have slipped himself down upon the ground a short distance he might have brought his teeth in contact with the thong; but this he could not do, as a burly Indian was stretched at full length just below him.

Considerably mortified, and fearing that the night would be altogether too short, he began very slowly to change his position, so as to bring his side to the savage. To his disgust the red-skin, tossing about in his sleep, constantly rolled nearer to him, until his body almost touched. He was debating in his own mind whether to kick or bite the intruding sleeper, when the figure grasped his arm and gave it a severe pinch!

A great light dawned upon the captive in the midst of the darkness.

"Tom!" came a whisper, as low as the evening zephyr.

The young man signified his attention, and the supposed savage resumed:

"I've been a good four hours gettin' tew ye, Tom. Ye're in a mighty onpleasant place. Do ye think ye kin git out if I cut ye loose?"

"I guess so."

"Ye want tew be mighty keerful. It'll be better tew git away without spillin' any blood if ye kin. Dark is a bad time to work. Don't make a move till I git out of here. When you go, pass right by the guard. He won't see—he's had a *stroke of the numb palsy*! Move a little ways from yer tree fust; if they don't see ye, creep away as though ye war treadin' on rash nettles!"

While thus whispering in Tom's ear, the White Slayer, for it was none other, had very carefully severed the thongs which bound the captive.

"Don't do any thing rash," he whispered; "remember what I told you!"

It seemed an age to the impatient Smith ere Dennis finally moved beyond his sight. He changed position somewhat, and found that his friend had disappeared altogether.

Now he was at liberty to move. He did so, and on gaining a position about three feet from his tree, paused for a few minutes.

No move or change among the savages seemed to indicate that the motion was observed. A foot or two more was added, and still all was quiet.

A few repetitions of the movement, and he was close to the fallen guard. A shudder ran over his frame, for such a death had much in it that was dreadful. He looked that way, scarcely knowing why he did so. A form was bending over the body of the sentry, which he took for the Avenger.

Very carefully regaining his feet, Tom stole toward it. A wild whoop of alarm sounded on the moment from the real savage, who had just discovered the mischief which had been wrought in their camp.

As he raised his eyes the Indian saw Smith, who stood not above two yards away. With one bound the Dacotah was upon him, and in less time than it takes to read it Tom found himself borne to the earth, and the keen knife of his antagonist held at his throat. Realizing that all resistance would be useless, he remained quiet, fully expecting every moment to be brained by the furious savages who gathered around.

The chief of the gang arrived in the midst of the excitement, and his orders were carried into execution. The white man was bound more elaborately than before, and the savages began to closely scrutinize the scene.

A knife—his own—was sticking in the savage sentinel's heart, and this seemed to the survivors proof positive that the prisoner had done the deed. Unfortunately Dennis had taken away the pieces of thong which had bound Smith, so that there was no positive proof of the presence of any third party.

A few questions were asked the prisoner, but his earnest assertions of innocence were only received by the savages as proof positive of his guilt.

What the council decided upon the prisoner had no means of knowing. A jealous Dacotah stood over him with gun ready for use at the first signal of alarm, while the seven who remained sat about in a circle not far distant.

There scarcely seemed a diversity of opinions, however, for when the result was reached there followed a general grunt of satisfaction.

The chief of the party advanced in front of Smith, lifted him to his feet, and held him against the very sapling to which he had been tied at first, while the braves bound him securely there.

Tom Smith knew too well the customs of the red-men to need any light on the meaning of these usages. If he had been in doubt, however, the words of the chief, joined to the taunts and blows of the others, would have enlightened him.

"The white men come from the rising sun," he said. "Pale-face looks now toward the land of his people. He would go there. It is good—he *shall* go. The fire shall carry him. The sun shall rise, and look upon the fire, and see his ashes. We have spoken. Let the pale face tremble."

The braves now scattered, bringing in twigs, leaves and dry branches, any thing that would serve to swell the grand scene. These they piled about the devoted man's feet, and finally preparations were made to light the heap.

Smith felt far from comfortable. The glow of day was mantling the east, and already the dim outlines of the forest were becoming visible. That the indomitable scout was at hand he had no doubt; but, alas, what was one man against eight well-trained and ferocious braves? Well he knew that his tormentors were in no state of mind to show mercy. Human suffering would be their delight. And what if the stern scout should fall into their hands? He shuddered to think of another tragedy being added to his own.

But might he not betray the scout, and thus save his own life? The thought dwelt with him but a moment.

"If I can I will not!" he said, with stern determination. "If I must die let it be with honor."

The jeering, mocking crowd enjoyed his unmistakable emotion, and strove in every possible manner to increase it.

The young man hoped to madden them sufficiently to induce a speedy, fatal blow ; but this, it was apparent, could not be done.

As the rosy glow mantled more and more in the east, the chief pointed back in the direction whence they came the previous day, and then the torch was applied to the waiting pile !

A dull smoke rose for a moment, and then a bright flame shot up, sending forth a rather agreeable warmth. But every moment it spread and increased in volume, and it was very easy to realize how, in a short time, that which was now a source of comfort could become an insupportable torture.

"The White Slayer can not save my life ; that is too much to hope," the wretched man sighed to himself. "But he *can* save me this torture, and may Heaven grant the merciful favor !"

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEATH DANCE.

WHEN the brush was lighted about the captive at the stake, the Indians began dancing and singing as only aborigines of the wild American forest could do. Their hideous howls, frightful contortions and grotesque posturings would have been sufficiently torturing, even without the fire. But what with the smoke, which threatened to suffocate the poor man, the heat, now fast becoming unbearable, and the exultations of the red tormentors, it is easy to realize that Smith longed for a speedy death, to put him beyond further torture at the hands of his Dacotah persecutors.

As the smoke rolled up about him in a close column, blind- and choking him, Tom was obliged to close his eyes, shutting out the world upon which the morning light was just breaking. So he did not see a human head which appeared at a little distance, nor observe the rifle-barrel which was pushed carefully forward until it bore upon the group of howling savages.

But Smith heard the report which followed, heard one of his persecutors drop to the earth, and the exultant song of the survivors change to a howl of rage and surprise. He endeavored to look forth, but the hot smoke blinded him, and he could only close his eyes again and listen—with what intense emotion may perhaps be better imagined than described.

Of course the reader understands that it was Job Dennis who fired the shot. After having loosened the young man's bonds, as previously described, he had stolen away to be ready to meet Smith when he should succeed in leaving the Indian camp. With no pleasant emotions he saw the failure of the attempt, and only refrained from rushing upon the savages, as he realized that any such movement would certainly fail of accomplishing the desired object, and hasten the young man's doom.

"I can't do any thing ag'inst that odds till daylight comes," he mused, "and it is an open question whether that youngster 'll need any help then."

Dennis had procured a rifle for Smith before making the attempt to liberate him, and it was that weapon which he discharged first. Dropping it the moment the bullet had sped, he produced his own double-barreled favorite, and while the first report was still sounding in the woods, it was followed by two more, in rapid succession.

Each shot brought down a man, it is almost superfluous to say, but then five were left, all holding weapons, and prepared for the onset which the scout must make in order to complete his work. One of their number, feeling that his captive was in danger of deliverance, sprung toward him with knife in hand. But the fire had been built so far from the victim's limbs, in order to give him a full amount of torture, that it required a little circumspection to give the fatal blow without encountering the flames.

Before the self-appointed executioner could deal the stroke, a pistol-shot from the dreadful scout came crashing through his shoulder, effectually relieving him of all further disposition for combat.

Only one of the four now remaining held a gun ready for actual use, and he had been prevented from firing thus far by the rapid movements of the scout. He was bringing his

piece to a level when Dennis' empty pistol struck him full in the face, and before he could recover himself, or dispose of the unusual number of "stars" called up by the blow, the Avenger had drawn his remaining pistol, and fired upon the Dacotah who held the rifle, piling him among his fallen comrades.

A terribly exciting struggle ensued. Three Indians still remained, and with knives and hatchets they closed upon the rash scout. Keeping them partly at bay with his clubbed rifle, he was still forced steadily back by the fury of their assault, and could only ward off the blows which were dealt at him, with no chance to strike in return.

Presently one of the Dacotahs succeeded in seizing his rifle, and then, with a wild whoop of satisfaction, the two closed around him. Few men then or now living would have been equal to such an emergency. Only that this man comprehended as by instinct every phase of a complicated and deadly struggle with his enemies, he must have been lost.

Dropping his hold upon the rifle, Job grasped the one of his antagonists the least prepared for such a movement, and while he kept him whirling around, to avoid the blows of the other Indians, struggled for the possession of the Dacotah's hatchet.

Such a struggle, from its very nature, must be brief. As they wheeled rapidly around the scout tripped the Indian, who fell heavily to the ground, relaxing his hold upon the weapon. On turning to face his remaining foes, Dennis found that they had separated, one springing toward the captive at the stake, while the other was about picking up the gun dropped by the fallen savage a few moments previous.

A moment's delay at this time must have been fatal to the success Dennis had so nearly earned. But he was not the man to delay at a critical moment. The hard-earned hatchet was hurled full at the back of the miscreant who was about doing Smith an irreparable mischief, and then another struggle ensued between the Indian with the gun and the almost triumphant scout.

The Avenger bounded upon the savage, and after several efforts succeeded in grasping the barrel of the gun before it

could be discharged. The red-man was no match for his antagonist in physical prowess, and in a very short time was laid upon the blood-reeking earth, with his skull crushed in by a blow from the heavy rifle-breech.

The brave from whom the hatchet had been wrenched was just rising to his feet, and on regaining them sped away into the forest-depths with all possible speed. Dennis leveled the piece, and pulled the trigger, but no report followed. Throwing the worthless weapon to the ground with a force which broke the stock, he hastened to set Smith free from his uncomfortable position. He found that he was none too soon.

The fire had been burning while the fight progressed, and had now attained a roasting fervency. The victim was groaning and writhing with the intense heat, and having no power to see what was transpiring about him, very naturally came to the conclusion that his friend had been defeated, and that he was to be left there to meet his painful doom.

But his emotions underwent a change when he heard the brands being scattered away from about him, and realized that deliverance was at hand. The first sight which met his eyes was Dennis, pale, bleeding and exhausted, yet with all the natural fire of his nature unimpaired.

Leading the rescued man out into the midst of the slaughtered Indians, the scout released his hold of him, and sunk upon the bloody earth, without motion or words. Smith sunk beside him, partially overcome by his sufferings, and partially by the sight which met his gaze.

"My friend, my more than friend," he said, "can it be that this is all your work?"

The scout raised his head. By the pale morning light eight Indian forms could be seen lying stark and bloody in the narrow arena. It was a horrible, sickening sight. Even the wild scout gave a shudder.

"Tom Smith," he said, with impressive tones, "I threw myself, single-handed, against these eight savages, for a quick, hand-to-hand fight. I expected to die, but meant that my life should cost the savages dear. Yet some strange power or fortune kept me, and I came off conqueror. Yes, and it was my hardest fight, too, for it was a fight to the death."

"A dreadful fight," said Tom. "I only expected that you would send a bullet to end my sufferings."

"You are satisfied with this, I presume," the scout remarked, in almost bitter tones.

"Yes, indeed. But if I could have escaped at first it would have been still better."

"Better than to lay out all these red-skins?"

"Yes, my friend, for, wicked as they are, I would not murder even savages when it can be avoided."

The scout drew his breath hard, and sat for a moment as though at a loss how to reply. Then bending a look almost of fierceness upon his companion, the White Slayer demanded:

"Look ye, Tom Smith, I want ye to suppose yerself married tew this gal, Sunlight, as the Injins call her. I want ye to suppose yerself settled on a good little farm with her, and two or three as bright, purty children as ever drew breath to make yer home pleasant. Then I want ye to imagine these red-skinned devils coming, and in cold blood murderin' them all right afore yer eyes! I want ye to think that those helpless, innocent children were hacked and torn to pieces right there, for no cause only that they were white and good and lovely, and that wife killed in the midst of her agony and tears and entreaty! I want to know if yer chicken heart would fail when ye had a chance tew pay part of the debt?"

"I can not blame you, of course," the young man responded, shuddering involuntarily at the picture drawn by the scout.

"Blame or not," was the quick answer, "that is what I have suffered, and I tell you there isn't Injin blood enough between the Atlantic and the Rocky Mountains to wipe out the scene. No, Tom, I don't know how the score may stand with me hereafter, but as long as I live I shall foller the trail of *her* murderers. That deed has cost 'em dear already, but very little to what it will cost if my life is spared. But, Tom, how bad are ye hurt?"

"Nothing serious. Be sure I sweat a little more than the case actually required, but my flesh is scarcely blistered at all, or very little. How is it with you?"

"All right, in the long run. The red knaves cut me up somewhat, but very luckily none of their knife-strokes or hatch-

ets went deep. Let me see : there's the three old ones, all done up, and a'most well. Then here's a new one on this arm, two on my back, and one here on the front of this shoulder—four new ones. They will need washin' out and doin' up, no more. But first of all we'd better get away from here, after we find some powder and balls for our guns."

It was not a long task to select a good rifle for Tom, and the savage who had borne it was well provided with bullets. To fit Dennis' rifle and pistols was not so easy a matter ; but even in that they were successful after a brief search, and having taken whatever would be of any service to them from the bodies of the fallen braves, they moved away, still tending to the south-eastward.

Without much effort they proceeded some five or six miles, when Dennis began to feel so faint from the loss of blood and continued exertion that it was with difficulty he could proceed.

"What say, Tom," he remarked, as they drew near a rocky hill range, "the lay of this land makes me think we may find a hidin'-place up near them hills. What do ye say?"

"I should say you needed a rest," the young man returned.

"Yes, so I do ; but it won't answer to lay by here unless we kin find a snug place to do it in. For a day or two to come there'll be a great inquiry hereabouts for two white men, and it won't answer for any white men to be seen. I, for one, realize that I can't run away, not to day or to-morrer, if there is a call for it. No, I hate to own it, even to *you*, my lad ; but the truth is I hev got to *lay up for repairs* !"

They came presently to a creek, quite broad but not very deep, into which they stepped.

"Let's walk up a ways," said Dennis. "Possibly we may be tracked, and it may be well enough not to leave any marks hereabouts."

They walked up-stream, avoiding places of uncertain depth, until they reached the hills before mentioned. Here the course of the stream changed abruptly, and above them it ran along the base of the rocky bluff, frequently half disappearing beneath some heavy projecting ledge.

They continued along for some distance, till the scout turned

and moved directly across the creek. Stepping upon a little ledge of rock, he pulled aside a cluster of bushes and a wild vine, displaying the entrance to a cavern.

"There, Tom," he said, "is the place we are lookin for. I'll risk that, if thar's any decent place inside. No snakes there, either; one could smell the brutes if they harbored there."

The White Slayer entered first, carefully feeling his way, and Tom followed closely. The opening along which they were obliged to crawl, rather ascended, and after passing along some five feet, enlarged to a rough, irregular room, in which the men could easily stand erect.

In five minutes they had secured the mouth of the cave so that none could enter without disturbing them, and when this was done they sunk down upon the bed of rock and soon both were sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER X.

SUNLIGHT.

As previously stated, the white maiden known to the Indians by the name of Sunlight, and to her own people as Mary Dawson, was conducted from the desecrated Blackfoot village by the main party of the Dacotahs, in company with two of the most beautiful young Blackfoot maidens.

Of course they understood very well the fate for which they were reserved, but there was no help for it, so they submitted for the time, only trusting that before their captors should have gone far, the Blackfeet would sweep down upon and exterminate them.

But when they were a little way on their journey toward the land of the victors, all hopes of this kind were speedily smothered. An especial guard was detailed to each captive, and instructions given them that in case any large body of Blackfeet appeared, the maidens were to be tomahawked at once. These guards were to have charge of them day and

night, and insure by all possible means their safety. If any danger threatened, the hatchet was to be used.

The three sentinels showed themselves fully interested in their trust, and from their manner it was not difficult to understand that they were quite as deeply smitten by the charms of the beautiful captives as their more fortunate superiors in rank, who had thus unceremoniously appropriated the spoil of beauty. How this admiration culminated we shall see presently.

All through the day the trail homeward was pursued, and at quite a good rate of speed, though not nearly so rapidly as the smaller party having Tom Smith in charge proceeded. Still, the captives, as well as the braves, were deeply exhausted when darkness settled over the forest, and, when a simple repast had been disposed of, all save the three guards threw themselves upon the earth, and were soon sound asleep. Of these, one kept close watch for the safety of the prisoners, while his companions obtained a little slumber.

In the morning all were ready for a fresh start. No time was lost in getting ready, and, as the sun began to gild the tree-tops, the party put themselves in motion.

Toward noon a Dacotah came toward them, bruised, trembling, frightened. He was recognized at once as belonging to the party which had taken away the white man, with instructions to go on in advance, and his appearance there, and in such a plight, raised not a little alarm in the breasts of the other savages. All pressed around him, and asked, with frightened impatience, to hear his story.

It was soon told. He related the progress his party had made, and how they encamped for the night, posting a sentinel. One of their braves, awakening by chance, found the sentry dead, and the prisoner on the point of escape. Then he related how the daring man had been bound to the stake, and, just as the fire began to do its work, a fiend in the shape of a white man burst upon the party and slew them all—only himself, wounded as they then saw him, escaping!

It may well be supposed that such a narrative created a great excitement among the Indians who heard it. They could not doubt the testimony of the brave, for he was one of the most reliable in their tribe, but they agreed with him that

it was a fiend in the form of a man, and not a veritable pale-face! As though it made any difference, so long as their braves had fallen!

A council was called, and, though the savages quaked with superstitious fear, they decided to return homeward as fast as possible, and, when their own country should be reached, offer up sacrifices and dances to appease the offended Great Spirit.

Beginning to feel more secure, and being now out of the country of the Blackfeet, they bivouacked earlier that night, and posted three sentinels to keep watch over all parts of the camp and vicinity. The three posted were the same who had taken charge of the maidens, with three others to relieve them during a portion of the night.

When the Indians awoke, just before dawn, they were not a little surprised to find both captives and guards gone entirely!

Nor could any trail or indications of their whereabouts be found.

Quite impressed with the presence of some supernatural foe, the Dacotahs waited until full morning before they made any preparations for pursuit, and then, regaining courage somewhat, they divided into gangs, and sallied forth.

Meantime, let us follow the fortunes of the captives.

The regular guards, claiming to be deeply exhausted by their previous wakefulness, slept until midnight, or, rather, they lay near together, and were to all appearance asleep.

But when about midnight those upon duty began to show signs of weariness, the others arose and relieved them. Then, putting their backs against three trees, the trio of watchers remained grim and motionless for hours, while all about them was hushed in deep repose.

Whatever plan these savages had been forming, it was fully perfected, beyond doubt, for, at a signal from one who seemed to be designated as the leader, each bent over one of the captives, and, after rousing her, whispered in her ears for a few moments.

The result of this strange procedure was that each of the maidens rose to her feet, and then, under the lead of a brave, stole silently and quickly from the camp.

No sooner were they out of the immediate ear-shot of the

sleeping party, than all the moccasins they wore were taken off and turned, so as to leave any trail they might make in the darkness pointing back toward the camp. Then, in single file, they moved back along the trail by which the Dacotahs had reached their present bivouac, until it was lost in the darkness.

Being unable to obtain further advantage from their present inconvenient arrangement, the warriors took off the maidens' moccasins, substituting others of a much larger size, with which they had come prepared, turned their own, and then struck off in a new direction.

They walked steadily and rapidly for two hours, under the guidance of their appointed leader, who seemed to have made Sunlight his especial care. By this time they had reached a region of country quite difficult of exploration, and entirely removed from the route of the Dacotahs. Here, after a little search, the conductor came to a creek with a heavy bank upon the left hand, which he ascended, scrutinizing the opposite shore as he went.

At length, leaving his companions behind, he crossed the stream, and pulled aside the bushes upon some rocks, disclosing the entrance to a cavern. His companions were beckoned across, and then a brief consultation was held among the three braves.

When it was concluded, the maidens were ordered to enter the darksome retreat, one of the savages saying:

"Stay here till we bring something for you to eat. Not go out, else had Dacotah see you. We keep you here—take you back home."

The maidens entered, and the braves recrossed the stream, gliding rapidly away, as though afraid of being seen. They did not pause to look back, and, even had they done so, would not have known of the strange companionship their supposed victims had found in the cavern.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT NEXT?

FREQUENTLY during the forenoon the two men were awake, but they did not rouse themselves, save sufficiently to make sure that all still remained quiet. They were quite worn out by the fatigues through which they had recently passed, and gladly improved this opportunity to obtain that rest they so much needed, free from the harassing presence of constant fear and apprehension.

It was considerably past noon when Tom awoke, feeling quite fresh and vigorous. He had a small quantity of tobacco, and a brier-root pipe of his own manufacture, which the Indians had left to perish with him. Filling and lighting the pipe, he moved down near the entrance, and seated himself to its enjoyment. In the white, murky clouds which hung around the mouth of the cavern, he soon found himself tracing pictures and forms which carried him far back into the past, and, insensibly, he began to live over the more recent years of his existence.

He was thinking of the very strange occurrences through which he had recently passed, and in which he had taken an active part, when he heard a movement inside, and, on looking about, saw through the gloom, to which they had now become somewhat used, that Dennis had risen from his resting-place and was coming toward him. The scout was paler than usual and his movements were a trifle unsteady, but there was a smile on his features, and the light in his eye was not paled.

He took a seat beside Tom, and the latter at once proffered his pipe.

"No, thank ye," Dennis said, "I've no use for the weed. I sometimes liked a smoke of my pipe years ago, but when this thing come upon me, and I give up all for vengeance I laid aside my pipe. I seen that it would allers be in the way, and make me a great deal of useless trouble, so 'bacco and I said 'good-by to one another."

Smith remained silent a moment, wishing something would occur to prevent him from further use of the filthy weed, and finally he turned to his companion.

"How do you feel after resting?" he asked.

"Well, though a little weak and a good deal sore," the scout replied. "But if I can lie still a day or two I shall be all right again."

"Do you think that can be done?" the young man asked. "Or rather do you think this a safe place to stay?"

"I can't tell how that may be," was the matter-of-fact reply. "But *this* I have no doubt about—within a hundred miles of here I've no idea there's any other place *as* safe as this."

"Then you don't think there's much danger of the Indians spying us out here for a day or two?"

"I don't know how that may be. I never ask such questions. We can't answer 'em. For many years now there's been only a few days in the whole time when I wasn't liable to lose my life a'most any minute, and yet, as ye see, I hold ontew it still. Ye can't dodge dyin' when the time comes. No matter how safe ye may think ye are, there's no git away. If the savages git our trail they may find us here, but not likely otherways. If they find us we shall stan' 'em an awful hard fight, and it will cost 'em dear if they do kill us. That's fur as I ever count up the chances. If I'd 'a' counted further than that this mornin' you would have stood a good chance of gittin' toasted."

The young man blushed when his companion spoke thus, and hung his head in silence. But after a few moments he said:

"I'm a coward compared with you, Dennis, but I am as much ashamed of it as you can be. I wish I had a more perfect contempt for danger, but I have not, and don't know how to obtain it."

"It isn't the best thing always," the scout returned, thoughtfully. "One may git it by mixin' right in hap-hazard, live or die, but he would be as likely not to live through the experiment. Whar a body has any thing worth livin' for I own it's better to take keer of life. And I suppose now you and that gal wouldn't have any trouble in fixing up things if ye could only come together some way."

"I don't know about that," returned Tom, with a tinge of jealousy. "Possibly now that her fancy of a chief has gone under she might prefer *one* of us—you have a claim there too, if I am not mistaken."

"You *are* mistaken," the scout hastened to say. "I was guilty of a weakness once, but I rejoice that it chanced just as it did. I was beside myself then, and it was a blessing to me as well as herself that she refused me. So make yourself perfectly easy upon that score."

"It's perfectly easy for me to make a fool of myself," Smith muttered, in a tone not audible to the scout.

The conversation then changed to other topics, and the two men sat there till darkness began to droop over the scene. Then they prepared the entrance to the cave so that it should be secure against all intrusion, and retired to sleep.

A little after midnight Tom Smith awoke. He could not sleep like his companion, principally for the reason that he was not so unconcerned as the latter. The novelty and danger of his situation so weighed upon the young man's brain that he could not compose himself.

He knew that the night was not nearly spent, and moved down near to the entrance that he might breathe the pure air, and prepare himself for another interval of sleep. But the more he endeavored to prepare himself the less he felt the disposition, and finally he gave up all idea of sleeping more.

Carefully removing the obstructions which had been placed at the opening, he crept forth and seated himself beside the waters, where, by the dim starlight he could study the grand face of nature spread before him. Hours passed and still he sat there, his thoughts roaming over a thousand subjects which would not interest the reader.

Suddenly through the intense stillness of the waning night it seemed to the young woodman that he heard a movement, as of a person or persons in the woods below. He heard it again, and withdrew to the shelter of the bushes, whence he could look forth undetected. That some human beings were approaching he was now confident, as nothing else could produce the sounds he heard.

Presently he saw them dimly defined upon the opposite bank, five or six of them, certainly, and he noticed with increased

alarm that they paused directly opposite, and seemed to regard the site of the cave with particular attention. Then one of the party, an Indian, as he could plainly distinguish, entered the stream and plunged boldly across.

This was quite too much for Tom, alone and unarmed as he was. He hastily re-entered the cave, grasped his rifle, and whispered to the White Slayer, who was awakened by the movement.

"The Indians are coming; one of them is crossing the stream now!"

"The reds, eh? How many of them?"

"I saw five or six. How many more there are I do not know."

"Five or six! Well, they'll have an exceeding nice time coming in here, I hope," growled the scout, as they crawled toward the entrance to the cavern. "Keep very still, and don't pitch in till I give the word."

"I'll do as you say," Tom whispered, very softly, for a rustling at the mouth of the cavern assured him that the visitor was very near at hand.

Putting their heads near together the two defenders selected a position from which they could observe all that passed without, while inside every thing was wrapped in the most complete darkness.

The reader understands perfectly well what Smith and his companion did not—that the savage intruder was guiding Sunlight and the two Blackfeet maidens to the cavern already containing the two white men. All the motions at the entrance were closely watched, and with weapons in readiness the two men waited for the moment which they expected would inaugurate a fierce and deadly struggle.

They were quite surprised to find that several of their visitors were squaws, nor was their astonishment lessened when they found that their errand was peaceful. The words uttered by the leader outside reached the ears of Dennis, who understood them.

"Say, Tom," he whispered, grasping the other's arm with a force far from agreeable, "it's the three prisoners—Sunlight and the other two! They're sendin' 'em in here to stay till muthin'—I don't understand it all."

Tom was burning to ask a dozen different questions, but there was no opportunity, for as Dennis ceased whispering the three maidens crept in, feeling their way along, directly past, and brushing the two scouts, of whose presence they never even dreamed.

At the same time the splash of the Indians through the water as they retreated could be distinctly heard.

While the late captives were conversing in the Blackfoot tongue over their new and unexpected situation, the two white men gathered near the rear of the cave, and consulted upon the situation.

"Well, what now?" asked Dennis. "I leave all these women matters to your disposal."

"No; not so," was the quick reply. "I am a boy in woodcraft. But it does seem every thing works for us. Here is Sunlight brought right here when we had given up all hopes of getting her."

"But the other two?"

"Yes; that's it. I don't know what we can do with them. Perhaps we could bind them, and leave them here till their friends come back."

"But wouldn't it be well to talk the thing over with the white gal fust, and see how the land lays? We don't need to lay our plans too deep till we know if she wants any of our help."

"But the others are with her."

"Never mind. I hope you ain't afeard of two Injin squaws."

"No, nor I *ain't* afraid of the Indians either."

Then, after a brief silence, he crept toward the three captives, and in a low voice pronounced the name:

"Sunlight!"

The three maidens started and listened, almost uncertain whether they had not been deceived.

"Sunlight!"

Again the low tones echoed through the dark cavern, and this time there was no mistaking it:

"Who's there?" Mary asked, in unsteady tones.

"It is I—Tom Smith," the young man replied.

"How came you there? Are you alone?" she asked.

At first he felt disposed to tell all, but upon second thought decided to be a little reticent.

"I have a friend close by," he said. "But I want to know about yourself. When I saw you last it was as a close prisoner in the midst of a large party of Dacotahs. How did you escape, and reach this place?"

"I will tell you all that it may be necessary for you to know," she said, in reply, at which Tom winced a trifle. "I have fallen in with friends among the Dacotahs, who propose to take us back to the home from which we were forced. They may return soon and I advise you to leave in a hurry, before it is too late."

Tom reflected a moment, then he proceeded:

"Sunlight, why will you not let me take you back among our own people? What possible earthly reason can you have for wishing to stay here among these savages, when you are capable of doing such things among white persons? I have a friend here, the White Slayer, who fully understands the country, and together we can get you away from all the savages with ease and safety. Will you go with us?"

"Tom Smith," the maiden said, in low tones, "there *is* a reason why I could not go with you if I would. And I have already given you reasons for staying where I am. How much longer will you risk your own life in this strange manner?"

"Ever and always!" the young man returned, impetuously. "You have no right to act so without a reason, and *that* you can not have. I will not leave you till you go with me to seek your proper place in the world!"

"Foolish man! you will provoke your own death. Go at once, I beseech you!"

"Then go with me."

"You had my answer days since. Do you relish refusals so well that you insist upon more?"

Utterly disheartened, Tom moved back to the side of Dennis, who had heard all that passed.

"What's yer opinion of the gal now?" the latter whispered, as the young man reached his side.

"Dennis, that girl is a puzzle to me—a perfect puzzle. I can make out most things, in some shape, but not her. What do you think of her? What is to be done?"

"I don't see any thing to do, only wait and let things work themselves out. Our great interest in is her, so we can wait, and, meantime, these gaps in my hide will be growing up."

"Shall we stay here?"

"Yes; why not? If them savages come back, we've got the advantage, and if they stay away 'tis all well enough. I'll settle the matter with the gal and squaws."

Smith gave his assent, and, when the White Slayer had moved a little nearer to the captive, he said:

"Miss Sunlight, we was here afore you came, and we want to stay a spell longer. But we'll promise to behave ourselves. If we'd been in a fightin' mood we could have killed every one of your party when they brought you here. But we feel peaceable jest now, and when your friends come back we'll keep parfictly shady, if you'll say nothin' about our being here. How's that? If you blow on us, ten to one a scrimmage will be the result, and if it comes off, you don't need to be told that the White Slayer never comes out second best."

The maiden expressed herself willing to accept the scout's terms, and agreed to arrange with the Blackfoot squaws, so that no betrayal should take place."

"I needn't tell ye," Dennis continued, "that if thar's any signs of an alarm we shall strike fust. And bein' inside, and knowing the place purty well, ye can imagine how the thing 'ill end."

"You forgot that I saved your lives once," returned Sunlight, in a meaning tone of voice. "You do not fear that I shall betray you now?"

"I ain't afraid of that. But I'll tell you, gal, thar's so much about you that I *can't* understand—"

"Possibly you'll understand it all some time," the girl broke in.

"*Possibly* I shall," the Avenger growled, as he turned away, and with his companion sought out the most retired corner of the cavern.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAVERN COMBAT.

SOMETHING like an hour passed after the arrangements recorded in the last chapter had been perfected. Day had dawned over the earth without, though it brought only a faint relief in the cavern. Still those who were habited there could discern the outlines of the place, and the forms of their companions. No further words had passed between the two parties, for neither felt like conversing.

Presently the sound of footsteps in the creek without were heard, denoting the approach of Indians. The two men handled their weapons, more from habit than intention to use them, and waited anxiously to see what act in the drama was next to be unfolded before them.

The bush which formed a natural curtain in front of the entrance was pulled away, and one of the Indians who had brought the party of maidens to the place entered. Exchanging sentences with those he came to seek, he was guided to their vicinity by the sound of their voices.

Here he deposited on the rocky floor his burden, which consisted of a quantity of bear-steak, wrapped in a portion of the hide. Then he proceeded to inform the party that while his two companions had gone back to throw their fellow-braves off the track he had remained behind to provide them with food, and to protect them.

Depositing his weapons in a secure part of the cavern, he threw himself upon the rock beside Sunlight, and began particularly to address his attentions to her. The maiden, somewhat surprised at the turn affairs were taking, changed her position several times, but the persecutor invariably followed.

Finding that he would not desist, and that he did not confine his attentions to words, Mary finally rose, and moved toward the corner occupied by the two scouts.

Tom had long been grinding his teeth in rage, and fingering his rifle impatiently, but Dennis restrained him.

"Wait, wait," he said, in a low whisper. "She knows we are here, and ready tew help her. If she wants our sarvices she kin speak for 'em. Let her git all she wants of these miserable red-skins. She prefers them to white men; let her have her choice."

Tom could not dispute the rough logic, while at the same time he was burning with vengeance against the Indian, and anxious to avenge the insults offered the maiden, whom he still loved, notwithstanding all the rebuffs thus far received.

The Dacotah, a little enraged at the resistance he encountered, sprung upon the white girl, and bore her to the earth, despite her struggles. Her companions, the Blackfoot maidens, hastened to her assistance, but the brave rose up, brandished a knife in their faces, and when they had been duly reduced to subjection turned again to Sunlight.

Springing upon her with a bound he bore her down again. At the same moment he dropped heavily beside her. As he remained motionless Mary rose quickly to her feet, and on looking around found herself face to face with the White Slayer.

"Perhaps you'll excuse the liberty I took of introducing my rifle-barrel to that skunk's head," he said, apologetically. "But I thought he was actin' *rayther* kind of foolish."

"I thank you," was the frank answer. "I supposed him my friend, but find I was deceived."

"Don't ye think you've had about enough of Injin friendship? It ain't tew late now to put yerself under the care of them that'll be true friends to ye. What do you say?"

"Why do you still ask me to go with you, when I have given you my reasons for remaining with the people where my lot has been cast? I thank you for your kindness, but can not do as you wish."

"I'll be eternally confounded," the scout muttered to himself, "if she ain't a piece of the biggest willfulness I ever seen yet. But she must have her own way I suppose."

Although it was not intended at the time, it was found that the scout's blow had been fatal, crushing in the savage's skull, and destroying his miserable life. The maidens making no objection, the body was dragged to the entrance, and cast into the stream, which bore it slowly downward.

"If any body finds him," Dennis remarked, "they'll think he fell somewhar, and broke his head. Now what had we better do? Stay here through the day, and then go on ag'in when it comes dark?"

"What else can we do?"

"Well, I don't see any thing. I ain't in any shape myself to ventur' out fur in broad daylight. Generally it would make no great difference to me, but now I couldn't do any running *to order*. What I did I must take my own time about. But by night, or in the morning, I shall be almost as good as new, and then, having no further bother about the gal, for I conclude you have gi'n up the s'arch in that direction, we'll go on as we kin."

"I see plainly that it's no use trying to do any thing with Mary. She has some strange whim in her head. What it is I can not make out, nor can I get it away. Much as I love her I see no way but to give her up!"

"Pshaw! you'll get over this love affair by and by. I confess she's a very pretty gal, and I made a fool of myself when I fust caught sight of her. But she's Indian at heart—that is plain to be seen."

It was afternoon before any thing further was heard of the Indians who had conducted the captives to the cavern, and then Tom and Job, who were sitting where they could look out, observed them approaching upon the opposite shore. Satisfied that the Dacotahs were coming there, the white men withdrew to their corner, to wait for any developments which might transpire.

The Indians came in with an air of weariness, and it was at once apparent that they intended to make themselves at home in the cavern for the present.

From their conversation, which Dennis partially understood, coupled with the gestures they used, the scout gathered that they had misled their people into the idea that some strange power had taken the maiden captives away. That they had followed, but had been able to trace them only a little ways, and that the Indians had readily swallowed this explanation.

The absence of their companion seemed to puzzle the twain not a little. They inquired of the captives, and were told that the missing man had been there, bringing some meat,

and gone again. Further than this the maidens dared not reveal, and the fact of their companion's absence made very little impress upon the Dacotahs. If he did not return there would be the greater spoil for them.

It was apparent very soon that these were no purer in intention than their more impulsive companion had been.

Suddenly the White Slayer started. As he turned his gaze from one of the savages to the other he was alarmed to find the last regarding him attentively. A moment only he doubted whether the Indian had seen him, and then he felt assured that such was the case. No movement on the part of the savage betokened the discovery, and this fact made the matter all the more unpleasant, for it showed that the Indian was wily and shrewd—a dangerous customer.

The scout did not dare avert his eyes, to communicate the discovery to his companion, since the very movement might give the Indian a fatal advantage. This was evidently what he wished to obtain, and for some moments neither moved or turned away their steady gaze.

Dennis, reposing upon the rock, grasped his rifle by the muzzle, in a very awkward manner, while at his back lay the weapon which had been taken from the Dacotahs. The savage, on the other side of the cavern, about twenty-five feet away, was sitting, with his rifle standing beside him, convenient to his hand. There was no mistaking the fact that he had the advantage in position.

Gradually, inch by inch, the scout saw that the red-skin's hand approached his gun, and that his arm was being bent to grasp it. He could barely distinguish the outlines, but he knew that his own movements were not any more distinct, and he imitated the strategy of the savage, save that he moved his arm toward the gun at his back.

His hand was close upon it, when the Dacotah suddenly caught his weapon, threw it into position, and fired. The cavern was filled with the smoke of the discharge, but as it jetted out, almost into his face, the White Slayer brought his rifle to bear upon the dusky form of his adversary and pulled the trigger.

To his surprise and consternation the worthless thing missed fire! Another instant and all parties were engaged in a fierce

hand-to-hand fight, in the midst of the smoke and darkness.

The movements of the Dacotah had given the first signal to his companion of the presence of enemies, and revealed to Tom Smith that a *dénouement* was at hand.

The savages sprung to their feet at once, and with true Indian valor opened an attack upon the maidens, who were entirely at their mercy.

The one at whom the Avenger attempted to fire produced a hatchet, with which he sprung upon Sunlight, and struck her to the earth before any one could interfere to save her. As he raised his arm for a second blow the scout was beside him, and they at once engaged in a fierce struggle.

The other Dacotah, aroused only by the movements of his companion, sprung up, and produced his hatchet, aiming a blow at the Blackfoot maiden next to him. Tom was just in time to catch the hatchet upon his gun-barrel, whence it glanced off. An instant the two regarded each other in silence, and then the Indian sprung upon the white man, giving utterance to a deafening yell, and striking furiously with his hatchet.

It required all of Smith's agility to defend himself, and even while he did so, he was driven back gradually. When a little ground had thus been gained, the savage turned quickly and aimed another furious blow at the Blackfoot squaws. Fortunately, they were anticipating something of the kind, and the one who was assailed warded off the blow with her hands, receiving only a slight cut upon the arm.

As though he had not been fully aroused till now, Smith rushed upon the red-skin, struck him to the earth with his clubbed gun, and then administered a blow which forever settled the Indian's murderous proclivities, and sent him to wander through the broad fields of the happy hunting-grounds.

In the mean time, Dennis was busily engaged with his antagonist. At the first close he had seized the uplifted arm which held the hatchet, and attempted to throw the savage. This, however, in his weak and wounded condition, was a great task, and, after one or two efforts, he desisted, owing to the great pain it cost him.

Changing his tactics, as he released his grasp, Dennis dealt the red-skin a heavy blow full in the face, which staggered him, and, at the same time, freed his arm from the scout's grasp.

The advantage would now have rested with the Dacotah, had he not been effectually blinded and confused by the blow he had received. The White Slayer had no weapon in his hand, but a heavy knife rested in his belt, and it was only the work of a moment to draw it.

Simultaneously the two gathered themselves up for a decisive trial, and met midway with a heavy shock. There was a momentary ring of steel, a gush of hot human blood upon the rocks, and then the Dacotah sunk down with his heart cleft in twain, while Dennis staggered back with a fresh but not deep wound in the breast.

Tom Smith, having already disposed of his foeman, was at his side, and anxiously inquired :

"How is it, Dennis—are you badly hurt?"

"No, I've only got another cut. That's nothin' when a man has seven or eight about him already. But this poor gal ; I'm afraid her willfulness has cost her her life."

Up to this moment Tom had not observed the mishap which had befallen Mary. But now, in an agony of fear, he dropped beside her upon the rocks, and carefully raised her head. It lay in a pool of blood, and her fair hair was covered with the sanguine current of life.

One moment the young man gazed, and then he rose to his feet, gasping forth wildly :

"Great God, she is dead !"

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO RAYS OF LIGHT.

"I EXPECTED that," the Avenger remarked, as he bent over the body. "It was a dreadful blow he gave her, but I could not help it; he was ahead of me. He's paid for it, though, now."

Examination showed a cut upon the side of the head, above and back of the ear, from which the blood was still flowing freely. But it bore no appearance of being necessarily fatal.

"See here," the scout remarked, as he examined the wound; "this gal ain't dead; leastways, I don't see why this should hev killed her. The skull ain't broke in, and the hatchet only glanced off. Course it's knocked her senseless, but that's all, I imagine. Get yer cap full of water, and we can soon tell."

Tom was so rejoiced at the assurance of his companion, that he forgot all caution. Taking his cap in hand, he made his way rapidly to the entrance, out upon the ledge in front, and down to the margin of the water. Here he quickly filled his substitute for a vessel, and was about to turn and reënter the cavern, when he was not a little disconcerted to find that all his movements had been watched by two Indians upon the opposite bank. That he had not been shot was due to forbearance or curiosity on their part.

From some cause he was allowed to return, and hastened with the water to where Dennis had placed the insensible maiden, near the entrance.

The blood was carefully washed away, the cooling water applied, and every possible effort made to restore animation, but without success. Not a breath or tremor indicated returning consciousness.

"I'm afraid it's all in vain," Tom sighed, as he rose from the rocks upon which he had been kneeling.

The Indian maidens stood near, the wound which one had received having been dressed by her companion. They now came forward, and, after a brief examination, one of them

pronounced Sunlight dead, while the other was quite as confident to the contrary.

"I don't think she's dead yet," the scout insisted. "Bring another capful of water, Tom, and we'll try a while longer. Maybe if we kin bring her 'back ag'in, she's got enough of red-skins this time."

Smith seized his cap and started for the water. Had it been some object less interesting to him than the restoration of the maiden he loved, very likely he might have hesitated at the thought of encountering the danger which must lurk there. But now he scarcely gave it a thought.

Crawling down to the entrance he glanced forth, but saw no Indians. Pushing aside the curtain of bushes, he was greeted by a sound as of a gun-lock. He hastily recoiled, but had only drawn himself back into the aperture when a flash and report broke from the opposite bank, and a bullet struck the rock within three inches of his head, but did no damage beyond scattering atoms of stone in all directions.

Having no weapon the young man quickly retreated, and met Dennis coming down.

"What is the matter?" he inquired.

"Some Dacotahs upon the other side," the young man explained. "They saw me before, and this time sent a pill over when I made an appearance."

A growl of vexation burst from the scout's lips.

"That's bad," he remarked. "We want some water, and must hev it. Let me see. I guess we'd better send out one of these squaws."

"But suppose they will not go?"

"They must go. You can talk with them in their language—tell them that if they will go and bring us some water, we will take them back to their own people; but that if they refuse to do it, we'll put 'em out and let the Dacs hev 'em."

The young man communicated to the captives the decision of the White Slayer, and, after they had considered it somewhat, one of them took the cap and went forth.

A yell from the opposite bank greeted her appearance, and a plunging was heard in the water a moment later. The maiden came back, bringing the water, but with marks of

terror in her face. By signs and broken sentences she gave the scouts to understand that the Dacotahs were coming across the creek to enter the cavern.

"Ye 'tend to her," said Dennis, pointing to Mary, "while I go down and see to the reds. If I want any help I kin let ye know. If ye don't hear from me keep right on working with her, fur I can't think she is dead."

Tom promised to heed the suggestions of his friend, and bent over the inanimate form of the maiden he loved so well, while the scout, hearing Indian feet upon the rock outside, crept down to meet them.

As he reached the position he wished to occupy, the bushes were carefully moved, and an Indian head appeared for a moment at the aperture. It was instantly withdrawn, and then another appeared upon the other side.

"Ye can't see any thing in that way," the scout muttered. "Ye'll hev tew take a steady pull, and then look out ye don't see stars!"

But the savages did not appear in any haste to "take a steady pull," and some moments elapsed before any further demonstration was made. Finally a something which strangely resembled an Indian scalp-lock was pushed down on one side of the opening, and remained there. The White Slayer held a pistol in either hand, but was not the man to throw away a shot.

"I guess that ain't an Injin's head," he muttered. "If it is, he can't see any thing till his eyes git down in sight."

But no eyes appeared. After remaining there for a time it was withdrawn, and something very similar appeared upon the other side.

"That's the same one," he growled. "I hev seen sech kind of tricks afore."

Again the object, whatever it was, was withdrawn, and another made its appearance. This time it was an Indian's head beyond any doubt, and very likely the eyes looked into the cavern, but if so they saw nothing of any benefit.

Dennis waited till the dark orbs were distinctly visible, and then his pistol spoke its note of welcome. The Indian pitched headlong in front of the entrance, struck upon the rocky shelf, and rolled off into the stream with a loud splash.

His two companions immediately sprung into the water, grasped the body and drew it to the opposite shore, but the work of the deadly bullet it was out of their power to repair. The scout, peeping through the leaves, saw them drag the body away into the bushes, and a strange thrill of satisfaction passed over his wounded and aching frame as he noted the bloody work his hands had wrought.

"I'm gittin' purty well used up," he growled, surveying his gashed and still-bleeding frame. "There ain't any great amount of blood left in my carcass, and very likely I may not stand it much longer. It seemed as though I was comin' up in here to meet my death, and I guess I was about right in my supposition. But one thing is sartin—if any *one* man ever could afford to die, *I* am that man. The red-skins wouldn't forget me for a year to come, not if I was to drop off right now."

The two savages were now joined by two others, and those who had learned the secrets of the place at once proceeded to explain them to the new-comers, as they stood grouped upon the opposite bank. The scout regarded the scene attentively gradually pushing the heavy rifle into position in front of him.

"I may as well help explain the state of affairs," he said. "They don't seem to comprehend matters fully. Just wait till I can get two in a line, then I can make the matter as clear ag'in to 'em."

He had not long to wait ere the evolutions of the savages placed two in range, and that moment his rifle spoke. One fell to the ground, shot through the body and howling with agony, while the other *limped* away with a broken arm. The two who were uninjured raised their fellow-comrade, and hastily removed him into the forest, out of eye-shot of the cavern. This done, they made the woods hideous with their signal-cries.

The dread Slayer reloaded his weapons, and then raised his body from the hard rock.

"They are out of the way for now," he muttered, "and I'll drop in and see how the gal is getting on."

He was met by Smith, who joyfully remarked:

"**She's alive, sir. Her eyes are open, and she is breathing.**"

"Good; though it's just what I expected. Now if we only had her where she could breathe some pure air. But maybe we can git her down near the openin'. Fust of all, let's put out these Injin carkasses."

The bodies of the two Indians were dragged down near the entrance, the Blackfoot maidens assisting with an apparently hearty relish. Then one was pushed out upon the ledge and over into the stream.

A yell of rage from the woods showed that the movement was observed by the savages gathered there.

"We'll send the other arter it," said the Avenger, "and then see if they don't waste some powder and lead on that 'ere clump of bushes."

The body of the Indian was pushed out after his fellow, and when it had touched the water, a wild whoop came across the stream, followed by several shots in rapid succession. Some of the bullets entered the cabin, but they did no harm. Sunlight was removed to a secure position, and the Indian maidens busied themselves in attending her. She was now conscious, and could converse somewhat, though suffering from the wound upon her head.

It was now late in the afternoon, and the prospect was anything but flattering. The Indians were gathering upon the other side of the stream in large numbers. At least a dozen could be seen, and fresh arrivals were frequent. The main body was out of rifle-range, but guards were posted near the creek, who kept a sharp look-out and amused themselves by firing at the entrance to the cavern every few minutes. It was plain to be seen that no move would be attempted till night shut in, but in what form the strategy of the Indians would then develop itself it was difficult to surmise.

The last of the dried meat which the scouts had brought in was divided and eaten by all save Sunlight. She had no wish for food, but lay in a sort of half-stupor, rousing at intervals, for a short time, and then relapsing into a calm indifference.

When daylight had about faded away, and all around was wrapped in gloom, Dennis gathered up his weapons, saying to Smith:

"Do you stay here and rest, Tom. I'll see what the red-

skins are up to, and when I find out, very likely you'll have something to do."

"No, no; do *you* rest, and let me watch," Tom exclaimed. "You are wounded and weak, and need rest."

"No, I feel quite well. I am rested, and shall not mind any thing of this kind now. Besides, I've seen so much of the reds, off and on, I shouldn't feel easy unless I was there. I don't know what they'll undertake to do, but I think we kin laugh at 'em, anyway. It's a difficult place to git tew—mighty difficult. We're well armed, and have got a plenty of ammunition. I'll go now. Don't ye sleep hard, for I shall call ye if I want ye, and *when* I call, ye want tew be on hand."

The scout moved away, and when he had gone Tom seated himself beside Mary, and took her hand in his. She did not resist, or draw away her hand. The gloom was so deep that he could not see her features, though he felt the hand in his own thrill and tremble as he held it.

"Mary," he said, after a long silence, "do you suffer much pain now?"

"No," she answered, speaking in clear tones, "my head does not ache so fearfully as it did. I shall be quite well soon. But tell me: can we ever get away from this horrible place? I know that you and your brave friend are fighting a great peril. Can we ever leave this place alive?"

"I think so," Tom returned, in a voice which was far from steady. "I have all faith in the White Slayer. He is very brave, and though covered with wounds, insists upon keeping watch at the entrance. Twice already he has saved my life, and regards five or six Indians in a fair fight as so many play-things.

"But suppose he should be killed? He does not bear a charmed life."

"True, and it is that alone which I fear. So long as he lives I feel safe. If he falls I feel that all hope is gone. But are you not talking too much, Sunlight?"

"No, no. My head feels clear, and the effort does not weary me. Let us talk while we may, for when we leave this place it will be—who can say for what?"

"I suppose, Mary, you will insist upon returning again to the Black-foot country?"

The tone was almost one of sarcasm, for from her remarks Tom had gathered that she was heartily tired of savages, and all connected with them. Imagine then his utter astoundment at her calm reply :

"I must go back !"

It was some moments before he could speak.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, at length.

"Only that my home is there, and I must go to it."

"Your home? What an absurd idea, Mary. A home among these enemies of our race! Why will you persist in this terrible delusion? I know not what else to call it."

"I have my reason, Tom; a good and sufficient reason. I can not leave the Blackfeet without dishonor."

"See here, Mary," Tom said, in a most impetuous tone, "I shall make no more love to you, without your permission. But if there's any shadow of a reason you can give me for staying among these outlandish Blackfeet I'd be pleased to hear something of the kind. Even now, after all we have done to save you from one tribe, you persist in going directly back to another. I don't see the choice, myself."

"Stop, stop, my friend," she said; "you wrong me by such words. I will tell you all, and then if you blame me further I can only let you blame me still; I can not do otherwise than as I am doing."

She paused for a moment, and when her nerves were calmed somewhat she said :

"I have told you how I was taken prisoner, and kept by the Blackfeet. That I need not repeat here. About a year ago I began to attract the notice of some among the Indians, who wished to place me in their own lodges. You may have known the old chief, Big Deer. He had several of the most beautiful young squaws in the tribe in his lodge, and I saw that he wished to obtain me, too. About the same time Rolling Thunder, the young chief, who was just gaining fame as a warrior, also saw and loved me. He told me of his devotion, and also that Big Deer was determined to make a slave of me. But he promised if I would love him and be his squaw, that he would wed me in as nearly the style of my people as possible, and I should be his true and only wife. Otherwise there would be no help, and I must go with Big

Deer. I was then inclined to admire the young chief for his bravery and apparent nobility of character, and seeing nothing better before me, promised that I would at some time be his squaw, if he would save me from falling into the power of the chief I feared. This he promised to do, and finally did, in a terrible manner. But no matter about that. I persuaded him to defer the sacrifice, for I could look upon it in no other light, till you came, and announced your purpose. You see that I was not free, for I had repeatedly given Rolling Thunder my promise to be his. Then this brave hunter came to me, likewise, and had I been free how soon I should have gone with him. But I was not. Perhaps I regretted the step I had taken, but I had been saved from a worse fate, and had no reason to complain.

"That terrible stormy night you fell into their power—you and the White Slayer. I knew you were doomed to a dreadful death, and I wished to save you. I went to Rolling Thunder, and implored him to spare your lives. He was inexorable for a long time, but finally consented, upon certain conditions. These, of course, bound me closer. I promised for you that you would leave the country at once, that I would immediately become his, and never attempt to fly from him. If I had an opportunity to escape from the Blackfeet I was not to take advantage of it. Now you know why I can not go with you, and why it is best that we should not be together longer than may be necessary."

"But what's a promise given to an Indian?" Tom asked, a little inconsiderately.

"It saved your life!" was the rebuke.

"Yes, I know all that. But the Indian, this chief, is dead. Your promise holds to him no longer."

"Dead! Rolling Thunder dead! How do you know this? Who killed him?"

"That I do not know, but it was a Dacotah. The White Slayer and myself both saw him fall in the thickest of the fight. We were looking on from the hill."

"Are you sure there can be no mistake in this? I supposed he escaped."

"You can ask these maidens," the young man continued.
"They must know."

"They do not know. They supposed, as did I, that he was alive."

"But I assure you he was killed. I do not say this to change your determination, but to tell you the truth. We both saw him plainly, shot down, and—there could be no mistake but he was killed."

There was silence for some time, and then Tom asked :

"Does not that change your determination, Mary? Will you not go with us to the settlement, if we go?"

"Wait, wait," she answered, slowly. "Let me think. My head aches badly, I have talked too much. Let me rest now; it will be better soon. Ah! what is that?"

A bright light appeared near the mouth of the cavern, sending a few beams into the darkness which surrounded the speakers.

"Rest, Mary, rest, there is no danger," said Tom, as he crept carefully forward to ascertain something in regard to the state of affairs without.

He moved incautiously into the light as he did so. It was only for a moment, but a bullet which passed within three inches of his head showed the experiment to be dangerous.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DISMAL NIGHT.

WHEN the Avenger moved down to the entrance of the cavern all was quiet outside. Till darkness shut over the scene the Indians had amused themselves by firing across the stream, but now that had ceased, and the very stillness seemed ominous. It was so, for it announced unmistakably that the savages had some plan in view which they intended to carry out under the cover of darkness.

A more prudent man might have waited for the onset, but, not so with the scout. He wish to learn of its character, and to prepare to meet the danger in an understanding manner. Accordingly he crept along till his head was outside,

and then waited and listened carefully to catch any sounds or movements of the savages. All was still.

As he attempted to peep forth the slight movement caused a rustling of the bush at the entrance.

"A plague on that thing!" he muttered. "We'd be better off if it were away. I can cut it down perhaps; I'll try at any rate."

His knife was produced, and carefully slipped down to the roots of the bush. One quick, steady draw, and it partially accomplished the work, for a section of the bush toppled over upon the rock with a rustle.

The sharp snap of a gun-lock not five yards away showed that the experiment was attended with some danger. The scout quietly withdrew into the cavern, expecting a second and more successful attempt to fire would be made, but such was not the case. The savages displayed a shrewdness which was quite annoying to the daring foe, as it revealed the fact that plans were afoot of which he had thus far been able to gain no inkling.

The night was dark—very dark. No moon had risen, and the stars which would have lighted up the scene somewhat, were shut in by heavy clouds. From his crouching place Dennis could gaze upon the dark, smooth surface of the water, but distinguish no objects where the surface was broken.

Time passed slowly, bringing no development. Occasionally a slight movement reached his ears, as though of some person changing position uneasily, but it might be only the ripple of the waters, surging against the rocks.

Finally he noticed a peculiar, rushing sound, as though some heavy body impeded the flow of the current, and soon a dark mass of something moved slowly in front of the entrance, and then stopped, as he knew by the increased agitation of the creek.

"I'd better get in a little ways," he muttered. "It may not be pleasant here in the passage."

He withdrew, sheltering himself behind the shoulder of the cave. Here he could see all that transpired at the entrance, and only expose one eye to any sharp-shooter who might be in waiting.

Presently his suspicions seemed about to be confirmed.

There was a rustling of the brush at the mouth, and soon afterward a faint light was discovered.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, silently, "they think to smoke us out, do they? I fancy they'll have a hard time of it. We shall stand a good deal of smoking before we go out into their tender embraces."

The flame shot up, sending a full glow of light into the cavern.

"So they want to see to pick us off, do they?" the scout muttered. "That fellow may get himself into trouble afore he knows. I'll give him a word of warning."

Even as the Avenger spoke, Tom did inadvertently expose himself, and a bullet whistled close to him.

"Keep out of the light," exclaimed the scout. "Git down here by me and lay parfictly still onless the critters try to come in; then give 'em particular fits!"

But the savages showed no disposition to enter. They knew too well the dreadful risk the attempt would involve, and the almost certain fate of those who undertook it. So they contented themselves with strengthening the fire, and pushing it more and more into the opening.

"Good! That's just what we want!"

"Good? I don't understand you!" responded Tom. "It looks to me any thing but good."

"That shows jest how little you understand Injin fightin'. You see they've poked the fire up in, so that they can't see any thing more that goes on inside here. While they are tryin' to smoke us out they will have no time for any thing else, and we can cook our meat at *their* fire!"

"Our meat! Their fire! You don't think of doing any cooking at such a time as this?"

"Why not? We've got a quantity of bear-steak here that needs a touch of fire. We never shall have a better time to do it than now. You get it, and I'll see to the roasting."

Quite as much amazed as he had ever been in his life, Tom produced the Indian's slices of bear-steak, still wrapped in the section of bear-skin. The White Slayer took them from him, and in the most unconcerned manner moved down to the fire, where he placed them upon the blazing fagots, turning and watching them carefully till all were done to a charm.

Then he returned, laid the precious food carefully one side, and sniffing the smoke-laden air, remarked :

"We don't need this any more, and it's getting too thick in here for comfort. Don't you think we'd better exterminate the fire?"

"Certainly, if it can be done, though I don't really see how."

"Never mind how, I'll show ye. Jist find a bowlder, nigh as big as ye kin swing comfortable."

It was not a great task to find a stone of the description given, as several were lying about the cavern. When he had made an appropriate selection, Dennis continued :

"Now just pitch that, fair and square, through that fire, with all the power you can possibly put in. Don't let it hit the rocks fust. I will stand back here ready with my old two-shooter, if any of the red imps are in sight. Do you keep out of the way!"

Smith had no particular faith in the plan, but he took his position with the heavy fragment of rock, and when he had given it a preliminary swing or two let it fly directly against the smoking, sputtering fire.

The result was fully up to the White Slayer's anticipations. The entire mass of sticks and brands was carried out of the passage-way, and most of it tumbled into the creek. The remains of the fire, flickering with an uncertain light, revealed the stooping figure of a savage, and at this the scout discharged his rifle. The Indian fell into the water, with outspread arms, but whether his injury was serious could not be known.

The Dacotahs quickly extinguished the remains of their fire, and then two or three guns were pointed into the cavern and fired. But their bullets flattened against the rocks without doing any damage.

A few minutes' silence ensued, and then a pale light appeared outside.

"Don't know what that means," the scout remarked. "Never knew Injins to try the same thing twice. Ah, here she comes!"

A stout pine-knot, fully ablaze, was hurled into the midst of the cavern, and fell not two feet from the spot where Tom was crouching.

"Pick it, quick !" shouted the Avenger, and almost before it had touched the floor it was drawn one side and extinguished.

A howl of disappointment—the first which had broken the silence of the night, marked the chagrin and rage of the baffled assailants.

Then followed another long interval of silence. Both of the men maintained vigilant watch, for at any unguarded moment the savages might spring a trap upon them.

Just as they were getting weary of the stillness and monotony, a dark figure was seen to close the mouth of the cavern, and then it appeared to move in gradually.

Smith cocked his gun, supposing it an Indian, but the scout placed a hand upon his arm with a warning pressure.

"'Sh !" he whispered, in tones which could not have been heard a yard away, "I don't fancy that's an Injin. They ain't quite green enough to dew any such rash thing as that. Wait, and ye'll see how the cat jumps."

For some time no further move was made, and some bundle or body was thrust into the orifice, completely filling it. Smith began to feel alarmed, but the White Slayer remained as calm and impassive as ever. In a short time, however, he suddenly cried :

"Down ! They're going to shoot !"

In a moment came a smothered report, and very soon thereafter the quick perceptions of the scout began to comprehend a new phase of affairs.

"See here, Tom," he whispered, "don't you smell that thing burning ? They are trying a new game, and a confounded mean one. They want tew smother us. I don't like it very well. We must pull it in, and see what we can do with it ; we can't kick it out. Phew, what a confounded smudge !"

It was evident now that the bundle in the passage-way must be speedily disposed of, else existence in their retreat would be out of the question.

An Indian's blanket, filled with some combustible and noxious substances, had been set on fire by the discharge of a gun. The outlet being stopped by the thoughtful savages, all the unenviable odor arising from the slow burning of the mass of woolen, feathers, and many other like savory articles was

Lorne into the cavern, where the already not over pure air was made almost unbearable.

"Look out now," cautioned Dennis, "for if they hear any rustling you may be sure they will riddle this place with bullets. Stand just here, so that you can help me put it out when I get it in."

Smith would have objected to this arrangement, which gave to his companion all the danger, but there was nothing left him but compliance.

The scout grasped the offensive bundle, and attempted to pull it in, but found the mass so heavy with stones that he was obliged to desist. The attempt alarmed the savages outside, who began thrusting their guns in and discharging them, staying all further proceedings for the time, and adding more powder-smoke to the already unbreathable air.

"We've got to do it," Dennis remarked. "We'll smother if we don't."

The savages were evidently tired of firing for the time, and taking the opportunity, he clutched the offending bundle, and with great exertion of strength dragged it in. The noise of the movement aroused the Indians, who began firing again, but for this the white men cared nothing, as they had now secured the object of their solicitude. It was a severe task to stamp out the burning mass, and they were glad to rush to the remotest corner to obtain a breath of fresher air.

Satisfying themselves that the maidens were not injured by the dreadful odor, the men set themselves about opening the passage to the outer and purer air. Tom armed himself with a stone, and had just taken a position to sling it at the obstruction at the entrance, when it was struck by a shot fired in at one side of the aperture. Perhaps his blood coursed a trifle quicker as the atoms of stone flew into his face, stinging like needles, but he only poised the missile more determinedly, and the next moment had the satisfaction of hearing the Indians' bundle and the piece of rock plunge together into creek.

A howl began to burst from the throats of the savages, but it was quickly subdued, and they waited with eagerness for the inmates of the cavern to come forth.

But the pure air slowly drifted in, and the place became more endurable, so that the refugees had no idea of going

forth to meet certain death. They waited for the next event in the dark drama.

But all remained quiet, and though a sharp watch was kept up, morning light began to dawn, and still the purposes of the savages remained a mystery.

CHAPTER XV.

AT LAST!

"WHY do you think the red-skins are so quiet?" Tom asked, as the White Slayer left his post for a moment, and moved back among the others. "It can hardly be that they have given up and gone away."

"Not quite. That ain't their way of doing business. They are up to something now down below us. What it is I can't just make out. They seem to be filling the bed of the creek with sunthin'."

"By jingo!" exclaimed Tom, "ain't they trying to make a dam?"

"A dam! What for?"

"Why, to drown us out of here, to be sure! What else would they make one for?"

The scout remained silent a moment, and then said:

"I don't know but you are right. But can it be done?"

"I think so. Let us go and listen."

"Be very careful, or you'll have a bullet through your head."

The young man crept down with a great deal of trepidation, and when sufficiently near the outlet he paused and listened.

He could plainly hear movements and splashings in the water, but even when he had remained listening for several moments he was unable to decide whether his suspicions were correct.

"You can tell in a little while," the scout said. "Morning is coming, ye kin see the light already, over on the other

bank. But we must be keerful, or the least movement 'll set 'em to poppin' away, and some of us may get hit."

"Strange how careful he is lest some one else should get hurt," Tom mused; "one would not suppose the possibility of danger to himself ever entered his mind."

In a short time daylight had become so generally diffused that objects in outline could be plainly perceived, though the details were still misty and indistinct.

The White Slayer had been peering out of the cavern for some time in gloomy silence, but now he stepped back, grasped Smith by the arm, and pointed out upon the waters of the creek.

The latter had been looking, but he saw and realized now what he not before observed. His face became a shade paler as he gazed.

The waters of the creek had risen perceptibly. So much, in fact, that the opening to the cavern was but a few inches above their level. The Indians could be heard hard at work below, and it was apparent that their efforts were being crowned with success.

"Thar's no help for it," said the Avenger. "We can't get at them, and if we could, we're in no condition to fight 'em. They can raise the stream several feet yet if they keep to work, and it's evident they mean tew. Afore that time they'll make it mighty uncomfortable for us. Now, we want ter talk up matters, and see whether we want to stay here and face the thing out, or whether the women want tew go back to the Dacs, and leave us to shirk for ourselves. You are used to talking with Blackfeet; try to make up their minds some way, while I see what I can make out."

Tom set out upon his unenviable mission, while Dennis busied himself in watching the slow rise of the waters. The efforts of the Dacotahs were telling most decidedly, and he could see that the tide slowly crept up.

The channel, fortunately for the purposes of the besiegers, was quite narrow and deep a short distance below, so that the task of forming a temporary dam, to set back the water, till the mouth of the cavern should be submerged, was quite easy. This had been the work of the savages, and how well they were succeeding was attested by the concern which the indomitable scout manifested.

In a short time Tom returned to the side of his companions. There were tears in his eyes, and his voice trembled.

"They all prefer to drown, if they must, to falling into the hands of the savages again," he said.

"Well, I must say they're sensible. I should prefer that myself."

"She has confessed, now, that she loves me," Tom added—"now that all hope is gone!"

"Lookee," said the White Slayer, with great energy, "you needn't say *all* hope is gone, jest yet. Who kin tell what an hour'll produce? It's well to be ready for such things, but, for all that, suthin' tells me not to give up yet."

"I can see no hope now," said Tom, despondently. "All I *can* hope for is that we may die together, in the consciousness of our love for each other."

"Bah! the idiot has got his love-cap on now, and he ain't any better here than a rotten stick!" the scout muttered to himself.

"See!" pursued Smith; "the water is over the ledge already. It will begin to set back in here in five minutes, and then what hope is there?"

"Only that it'll take a good while to get deep enough to drown us. But hark! Don't you hear something?"

"Only the Dacs moving around," returned Smith.

"But, I tell you they are movin' around for somethin'. See, yonder go some, running down! Ah! ah! there's a fight, I tell you!"

This last exclamation was caused by the reports of two or three guns in quick succession, the bullets of which, strangely as it seemed, did not patter against the rocky walls of the cavern. The evidences that the White Slayer was correct in his assertions increased every moment. Yells, whoops and shots filled the air, though none of the combatants were to be seen. The scout danced about in a fever of excitement.

"What do you think of that?" he demanded. "I tell you it's all right with us. The Blackfeet have come, and the Dacs will scatter in a hurry!"

"I see—we can have a chance to jump out of the frying-pan into the fire!"

"No, I don't believe that. Here are these Blackfoot girls

THE DOOMED RED-SKINS.

that we've saved. They wouldn't stand by and see us killed, not if I am any judge. Then I'm goin' to help the Blackfeet if I can get out. The thing ain't even. The Dacs have guns, and the others only arrows. If I get out safe, come on, you, and we'll make things all right."

Smith endeavored to restrain his ardent companion, but the scout's blood was up, and he would brook no words of caution. He was right in supposing that the attention of all the besiegers was drawn to their new enemy, and although the water was nearly up to his waist, he was soon upon the other bank, where the general features of the battle were all made plain to him.

A small party of Blackfeet, not much superior to the Dacotahs in numbers, and not as well armed, had come suddenly upon the latter as they were laboring in the creek, and opened an assault from their bows. The latter hastened to secure their guns, and a straggling fight was now going on, quite interesting, but not decidedly fierce.

In a short time other Blackfeet began to arrive upon the scene, showing the attacking party to be but the advance-guard of a much more considerable force. They now began to press the attack, and the prospect did not appear particularly flattering to the defenders.

Just at this time, and while the White Slayer was debating within himself in what manner he should deal a telling stroke, the dam constructed by the savages gave way, and the accumulated waters went down with a rush. The attention of some of the savages was called to the cavern by this occurrence, and they were just in time to behold Smith, as he rose to his feet outside the entrance. An Indian within easy gunshot leveled his weapon, and began to take a deliberate aim. But it was cut short by a bullet through his head from the scout's rifle.

This, of course, drew attention in that direction, and four of the Dacotahs, unheeding the conflict now going on in front of them, rushed back to enjoy the satisfaction of closing their redoubtable enemy's war-path.

It was easy to perceive that but one of them had a loaded gun, and he received the benefit of the scout's second barrel, pitching upon his face midway of the distance. As Dennis

dropped his rifle and produced a pistol in each hand, the savages sought cover, and began to reload their weapons rapidly.

Tom Smith, seeing the danger that might soon environ his friend, shot one of the trio, wounding him badly, and then rushed across the creek to render further assistance. Side by side he and Dennis charged upon the two Indians, and only one found safety in rapid flight.

The Blackfeet, seeing the assistance they were receiving, pressed forward, and the Dacotahs, finding themselves assailed upon three sides, broke and fled wildly through the forest, followed closely by most of the victors. A half-dozen gathered about the White Slayer, and appeared inclined to regard him in the light of a prisoner.

One even went so far as to place a hand upon the fatal double rifle, but he was pushed aside, and the scout seemed measuring the party with his eye, while the savages, with deep scowls, were evidently far from regarding him with friendly feelings.

Within another minute, no doubt, matters would have culminated in violence, but just then the maidens from the cavern made their appearance. They were greeted with the most earnest satisfaction by their people, and at once interposed in behalf of the scout. But so deep was the feeling against him that not till the maidens had related how the brave man saved them from dishonor and death at the hands of the Dacotahs did the savage brows lighten up.

Then, indeed, they gathered around and greeted him kindly, expressing their satisfaction at his conduct. In a short time the chief, a brother of Rolling Thunder, arrived upon the scene. He was rejoiced to find the maiden of his love safe and uninjured, and when he was informed of the part taken by the White Slayer, expressed his gratification in the most earnest manner.

Sunlight knew well the meaning of the official robes upon the brother of him who had been chief, and she scarcely needed to ask him the questions which trembled upon her lips. But, she led him aside and conversed earnestly for some time. At length she turned to Dennis and Tom, and said, in tones of triumph :

"I have made terms for us all, if you will accept them."

"What are they?" Dennis asked, while Smith could only grasp her hand and press it in a fever of expectation.

"I told Bear's Tooth of your valor, and how many of the Dacotahs you had killed. How you had kept these maidens from harm, and joined with his men in the fight. He promised to spare your lives and freedom. Stop—he promised more. He has a large, powerful party, and is going into the country of the Dacotahs, to avenge the ruin they wrought among his people. He promises that you shall go with him as far as you wish, and return to your people."

"And you, Mary?" Tom asked, holding her hand closely.

"Why do you ask?"

"You will not desert us—you will go too?"

"Yes, if you wish," was the instant reply. "Rolling Thunder is dead, and I am free from my promises to him."

We need not state how Tom Smith ignored the presence of all the savages thereabouts, and called Mary by many endearing names. Nor need we state why the White Slayer walked gloomily one side, with downcast head, for we do not know. Possibly the memories of the past came to him with great force, and it may be that some traces of his sudden passion for Sunlight still lingered.

A grand party of Blackfeet swept down toward the Dacotah country, burning with a fierce desire to exterminate their enemies. How well they succeeded it is not the purpose of this narrative to describe. The proper history will relate all the particulars. But three white persons attended them, of whom these pages have treated extensively. The Indians, forgetting the wrong done their people by the dread White Slayer in view of his subsequent services, maintained friendly relations with him until a point was reached where it was thought best for the whites to separate from their companions, and make an effort to reach the settlements.

The adventures which befell them on the balance of the route would make an interesting volume, but in due course of time they reached the borders, and here they stopped for rest.

Tom and Mary were sadly wearied by their many adventures, but a few days' rest, with their love for each other, were all the restoratives they needed.

WHITE SLAYER, THE AVENGER; OR,

The White Slayer, with his many wounds, some of which were quite serious in nature, was barely able to reach the end of the journey, but here, rest and care speedily restored him, and in a few weeks he was away again, upon the trail of the doomed red-skins.

Tom and Mary, now his wife, are still living in the Far West, and, reader, if you ever pass their happy home you will receive a hearty welcome.

THE END.

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Give a dog a bad name. For four gentlemen.
Spring-time wishes. For six little girls.
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Mayor. Acting charade. For four characters.
The smoke fiend. For four boys.
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The fairy's warning. Dress piece. For two girls.
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An old-fashioned duet.
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 Afternoon calls. For two little girls.
 Ned's present. For four boys.
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 Telling dreams. For four little folks.
 Saved by love. For two boys.
 Mistaken identity. Two males and three females.
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 "Sold." For three boys.</p> | <p>An air castle. For five males and three females.
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 Not one there! For four male characters.
 Foot-print. For numerous characters.
 Keeping boarders. Two females and three males.
 A cure for good. One lady and two gentlemen.
 The credulous wise-acre. For two males.</p> |
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| <p>A successful donation party. For several.
 Out of debt out of danger. For three males and three females.
 Little Red Riding Hood. For two children.
 How she made him propose. A duet.
 The house on the hill. For four females.
 Evidence enough. For two males.
 Worth and wealth. For four females.
 Waterfall. For several.</p> | <p>Mark Hastings' return. For four males.
 Cinderella. For several children.
 Too much for Aunt Matilda. For three females.
 Wit against wife. Three females and one male.
 A sudden recovery. For three males.
 The double stratagem. For four females.
 Counting chickens before they were hatched. For four males.</p> |
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| <p>The Dark Cupid; or, the mistakes of a morning. For three gentlemen and two ladies.
 That No'er-do-well; or, a brother's lesson. For two males and two females.
 High art; or the new mania. For two girls.
 Strange adventures. For two boys.
 The king's supper. For four girls.
 A practical exemplification. For two boys.
 Monsieur Thiers in America; or, Yankee vs. Frenchman. For four boys.
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 The way he managed. For 2 males, 2 females.
 Fandango. Various characters, white and otherwise.
 The little doctor. For two tiny girls.
 A sweet revenge. For four boys.
 A May day. For three little girls.
 From the sublime to the ridiculous. For 14 males.
 Heart not face. For five boys.</p> |
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 Pedants all. For four females.</p> |
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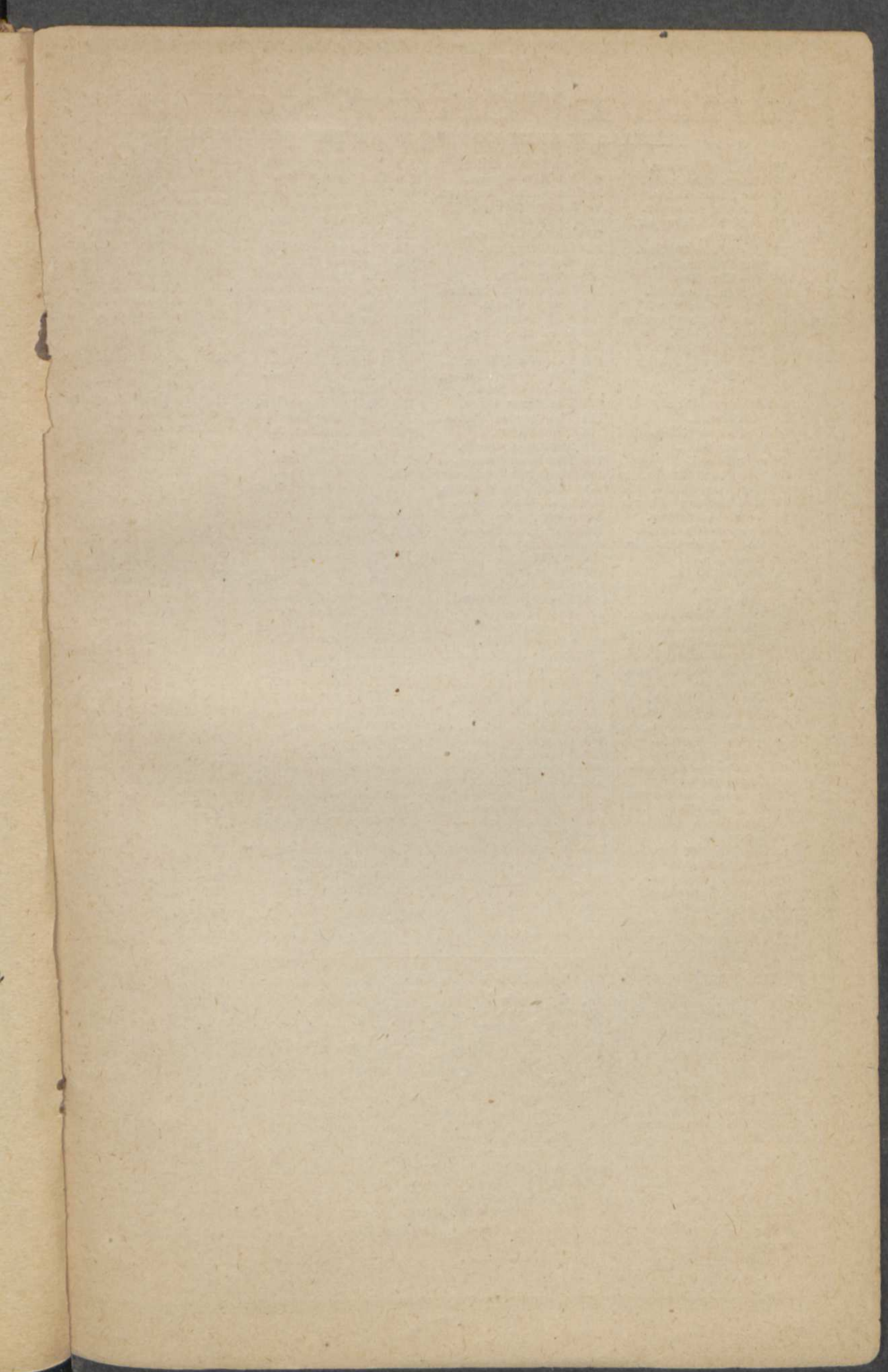
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